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THE ALL-STORY



FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, NEW YORK

LONI



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OF ALL SCENTED SOAPS PEARS’ OTTO OF ROSE IS THE BEST.

Victrola



Victrola XVI

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Quartered oak, - \$200

Mahogany, . . . \$200

Music made loud or soft by opening or closing the small doors.

Contains albums for 150 records and drawer for accessories.

The most wonderful musical instrument the world has ever known.

"Wonderful indeed!" you'll say after hearing the *Victrola*, for this new instrument is the greatest step forward made in any musical instrument for many a day—since the advent of the Victor.

The *Victrola* is the first and only instrument of its kind. It is not simply a cabinet containing another instrument, but is a complete instrument in itself—specially designed and constructed, and embodying new and exclusive patented features.

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"Where does the music come from?" you ask. Beneath the lid of the *Victrola* is a turntable on which the Victor Record is placed. From there the tone-waves are carried through the tapering arm down to the sounding board surface which amplifies and reflects them. And the melody floats out from behind the small doors which can be regulated to make the music loud or soft at will.

This then is the *Victrola*—the most wonderful of all musical instruments. But you can't know how wonderful it really is until you hear it, for the *Victrola* has a tone-quality such as is possessed by no other instrument.

Hear the *Victrola* today at the nearest Victor dealer's—he will gladly play it for you. Look for the Victor Dog on the inside of the lid.

Write to us for complete catalogues of the *Victrola*, the *Victor*—large range of styles, \$10, \$25, \$32.50, \$40, \$50, \$60, \$100—and of over 3000 *Victor Records*.

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Berliner Gramophone Co., Montreal, Canadian Distributors.

To get best results, use only Victor Needles on Victor Records.



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The All-Story Magazine

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BANNISTER MERWIN'S NEW SERIAL

"IF A MAN DIE"

will begin next month. Here is a story of two dead men, of revenge and of life after death.

ISSUED MONTHLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London

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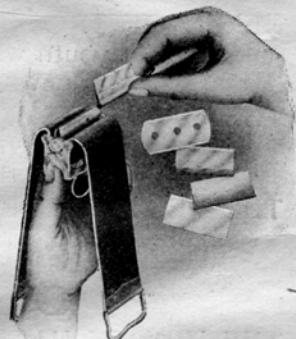
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Address.....
City.....State.....



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Be sure to state in the coupon the kind of blade you use.

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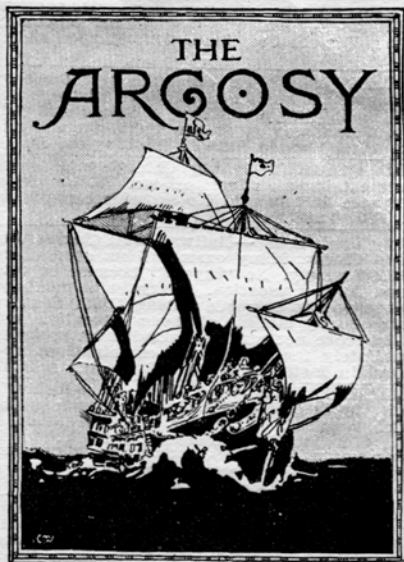
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New York City

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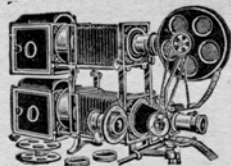
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THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE.

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No. 4

WHEN THE WORLD STOOD STILL.

BY JOHNSTON McCULLEY.

Being probable chapters in United States history, showing how an invention and a woman saved the country.

CHAPTER I.

"A MILLION MEN HAVE DIED ALREADY."

OUT of the west there flashed a shaft of bright light. The watchers at the Washington aeroplane depot hailed it with cries of glad relief. They watched as it dropped into a focus, as it searched the heavens and finally rested upon the depot. Then it disappeared for a moment, and a red light shot out and flashed back and forth through the air.

"She's signaling!" Eperson cried.

"I didn't catch it," answered Captain Goodwin. "Let's go into the station."

The military man led the way, as they ran across the broad steel platform, up the winding stairs, and to the signal-tower. They burst into a room where wireless receivers flashed their tiny blue sparks of intelligence, where the steady crashing of conflicting currents of electricity made a continual din, where coatless men, the perspiration streaming down their pale faces, stooped over keyboards and tables, consulted maps, read yards and yards of tape.

"The aeroplane signalman!" Captain Goodwin demanded.

"On the balcony, sir," an attendant replied.

Goodwin raced to the balcony, Eperson following closely. The signalman was snapping off a stream of green light of great intensity. A single flash of red came from the approaching air-craft.

"Good morning, sir," the signalman said, catching sight of Goodwin's pale face.

"Her message, man! This is no time for greetings!"

"She says she is coming in to report, sir—that's all."

"Is it the Aragon?"

"It is, sir."

"She didn't give details—didn't say what she was going to report?"

"No, sir."

Captain Goodwin grasped the operator by the shoulders and whirled him around until the eyes of the two men glowed into each others' less than six inches apart.

"You're lying to me! You're holding something back!" the captain screamed.

"I can read the lie in your eyes."

"I—"

"Don't lie. What are you holding back?"

"She didn't say what she was going to report, sir."

"But she said something besides making the statement she was coming in? What was it?"

"She didn't—"

"Tell me the truth!" Goodwin cried.

"Very well—I'll tell you the truth!" the operator answered, hurling himself free. "This is her message—that she has important reports to make; that they are for the President only—"

"I am the President's chief of staff, fool!"

"And the Aragon added, sir, that under no circumstances was I to inform you of the coming report—that the report was for the President, and not for you."

"You cur!"

The operator sprang forward quickly, and came to a stop within a few feet of where Goodwin stood, his eyes flashing anger, his hands clenched.

"If I were you, Captain Goodwin," he said, "I wouldn't say that again!"

"You dare to threaten me? I'll have you thrown into jail for treason! I'm your superior officer—"

"I belong to the signal corps, sir!"

"And still I am your superior officer—I, the President's chief of staff."

"You have not the right to call me a cur!"

Eperson ran forward and sprang between the men.

"Fools—both of you!" he cried. "You're letting this thing get on your nerves! This is no time for trivial quarrels. Goodwin, wake up, think! And this operator—he'd better get back to his business."

Goodwin turned on one heel and started for the stairway. Eperson remained behind and patted the tired operator on the shoulder.

"Never mind Captain Goodwin's words," he said kindly. "This business has unstrung all of us. And then you hurt him a little with what you said."

"I told him the truth, Mr. Eperson. He demanded to know the truth. It's none of my business why the captain of the Aragon sent such a message, but it is my business to receive that message and see that it is delivered according to instructions."

"I understand," Eperson replied. "Just let it drop, will you?"

"If you ask it, sir."

"Thank you. Going down to the room?"

"No—I must remain on duty here until relieved."

"Ah! How long have you been on?"

"Twenty hours, sir."

"Twenty hours? At signal work?"

"I—I know it is dangerous, sir. I'm liable to make a mistake that will cause trouble. Sometimes I get dizzy and my eyes can scarcely read the lights. I made

the Aragon repeat her message, so as to be sure there was no mistake. But what can we do? Every signal man that could be spared was rushed to the front. They need them worst out there."

The operator waved a hand toward the west. Eperson looked in that direction, watching the bright bow-light of the approaching Aragon.

"How soon will she be in?" he asked the operator.

"The Aragon, sir? In about an hour, I think. She was one hundred and forty miles out when she reported."

"Thanks again. Well, I must go below. Take care of yourself, boy."

"Thank you, sir."

Eperson hurried across the signal balcony and descended the steel stairway. Captain Goodwin was pacing the floor of the operating-room, his hands clenched at his sides. He was cursing.

An operator who was off duty for a few minutes approached Eperson.

"You're Captain Goodwin's friend, sir," he said, "and we wish you'd try to get him out of this room. We know, of course, sir, that the anxiety is crazing him. But he is crazing us, too, and we have to have good nerves."

"He knocked Cadwaller down a few seconds ago, just because Cadwaller got in his way. Captain Goodwin's nerves are broken, sir. We can't have him knocking operators round like that—we're short of men now."

Eperson bit his lip and looked annoyed.

"I'll do what I can," he said, and walked around a keyboard and across toward Goodwin.

"What were you doing so long on the balcony?" the captain demanded. "Are you against me, too, Eperson?"

"Nonsense, man! You're all unstrung!"

"Unstrung!" Goodwin cried, reeling against the wall. He threw back his head and laughed—a laugh that was not pleasant to hear. "You call me unstrung! Who wouldn't be?"

"The West is drenched with blood, the sea is filled with shot-riddled ships, the people are crying for food to west and east and south and north. There are widows and orphans by the million, Eperson. Our great cities are in ruins—

except those along the Atlantic. And our last chance—No, it isn't our last chance, for even if they whip us out there—"

"Hush!" Eperson warned. "There are ears here!"

"They may as well hear it! That battle is decisive! It is our last chance. But we'll never give up. Every man of us will go down to death first. The United States of America never gave up yet, and please Heaven they never will! Eperson, I got a telegram from Cincinnati an hour ago. They are recruiting a regiment of women out there. Think of it—women! So you see we'll never give up! Perhaps you don't understand—"

"I'm a Britisher," said Eperson simply, "and so, you see, I do understand."

Goodwin looked at his watch, snapped it shut and returned it to his pocket.

"Two o'clock in the morning," he said. "And we haven't had a message since three yesterday afternoon. What are they doing out there in the West?"

"We'll know soon," said Eperson. "The Aragon will be in in less than an hour."

"The Aragon!" Goodwin exploded. "With that fool, Captain Howard, in command. The contemptible pup! Why do you suppose he sent that message—made a fool of me before that signal-man?"

"I don't know, Goodwin. Calm yourself! Come out into the depot and get the air. The troops have crowded out the public—there are not many people about."

Goodwin allowed Eperson to guide him from the operating-room. As they stepped out upon the great receiving platform, they could see that the Aragon was much nearer, her bow-lights much brighter.

"She's flying fast," said Eperson.

"But why in the world doesn't Howard send his messages ahead of him? Doesn't he think we want to know? Doesn't he think the President wants to know, that the people want to know? Doesn't he—"

"Wait," Eperson said. "Perhaps he has some reason."

"The Aragon is turning. Isn't she going to land here?"

"Of course she'll land here, Goodwin. Calm yourself!"

The chief of staff paced back and forth across the steel platform.

"Calm!" he cried. "Who could be calm in such a case, except a Britisher? It isn't your country that is tottering!"

"Goodwin!" Eperson exclaimed. "You forget that two months ago Britain formally tendered the United States her armies and her navies to help you against the Asiatics. Britain meant it, Goodwin. It is as much to Britain's interest, and to the interest of every other European nation, to see you whip them as it is to yours. We offered our aid—so did Germany—and France—"

"And we refused," exulted Goodwin. "We told you it was our quarrel."

"Which it isn't. It started with you, of course, but every European nation is back of you. If you go down and out, we'll have to take it up. The Asiatics cannot be allowed to win. And maybe they haven't."

"That's our hope—that they haven't," said Goodwin in a changed voice. "If they have—well, I'll accept that regiment of Cincinnati women, and I'll call for more regiments of women—"

"Is it worth it?" Eperson asked.

"Worth it?" Goodwin cried. "Eperson, every city and town may be in ruins, our capital may be burned, our armies scattered, all slain but women and boys and old men—and still we'll fight! We've drenched the nation in a sea of blood already—a second drenching will not hurt."

"Nine-tenths of the available able-bodied men of the country are out West there now—facing a number equally large, if not larger. If they are wiped out, what can we do—but fight with women?"

"Britain and Germany have their fleets and transports ready, man! They can sail at an hour's notice! Ask for them!"

"No," thundered Goodwin. "Not unless we win!"

"Why, you'll not need them if you win!"

Goodwin laughed.

"Won't we?" he cried. "We'll need them, for if we win I will throw every available man in the field. There'll

be no quarter! The Asiatics have shown us none. We'll drive them into the sea, then embark on the Pacific and go to their own battle-fields, and we'll put them to the sword—men, women, and children—"

"You talk like some brute of the Middle Ages!"

"Who would not? Look what they have done to us! Do you know my ambition, Eperson?"

"Ambition—you? I thought you were without ambition. You—chief of staff, and yet you hold only the rank of captain and will accept nothing higher! You, the greatest man in your country to-day, before whom every one bows, whom the President himself looks to for counsel before his Cabinet officers—you, a mere captain! And yet you now say you have ambition! Well—what is it?"

Captain Goodwin wheeled and faced him. In the path of light from a nearby window, the warrior's face was stern.

"Eperson," he said, "my ambition is to be the man to wipe the Asiatics off the map of the world—not the Asiatic countries, but the Asiatics themselves. I don't want one left alive. I want to have them hunted in every corner of the earth and slain like dogs, I want—"

"Goodwin! Are you mad—are you inhuman?"

"That is my ambition," said Goodwin sternly.

"You mean it?"

"I mean it, Eperson."

The Britisher turned away.

"I'm sorry," he said. "We've been good friends for years."

"What do you mean, Eperson?"

"Simply that I admire a warrior that never cries surrender—but I do not admire a warrior who could exterminate a conquered foe, who would cry 'thumbs down' to a vanquished rival. You're mad, Goodwin; you're unstrung!"

"I mean what I said," Goodwin declared. "If that changes your friendship, so be it!"

"Goodwin!"

"So be it, I say! I'm done with you!"

Eperson looked at him for a moment, then turned and walked slowly across the platform.

"He's mad," he muttered. "But he'll be all right to-morrow—yes, he'll be all right to-morrow!"

Captain Goodwin remained on the landing-stage, watching the Aragon. She was within a few miles now, and coming up swiftly. The chief of staff could see men moving on her deck, could see all her lights, could see her gigantic wings beating the air, and could hear the drowning music they made.

He retreated to the edge of the stage as the great air-craft hovered over the depot. Men were crying to each other within, but trained troopers held them back. No person except Captain Goodwin, chief of staff, was on the stage as the Aragon gracefully settled into position.

From the streets below came the cries from thousands of throats. Lights were flashing throughout the city. The people were eager for the news, good or ill.

As the ship rested lightly in its place and its wings ceased beating the air, a landing stage was thrown out. Goodwin was upon it before it touched the steel flooring, and running up into the ship. The first man he met was Captain Howard, who was hurrying toward the stage.

"Wait!" Goodwin commanded.

Captain Howard fell back and saluted.

"Well, sir?" he asked.

"You sent a message—an impudent message—to the receiving station!"

"I did not intend to be impudent, sir. My message was that I had important reports for the President only, and that the President was to be awakened at once."

"That was not all."

"No, sir! I said, also, that the reports were for the President personally, and not for his chief of staff. I said that to make sure the President would be awakened. It is imperative."

"Has the President any secrets in this matter from his chief of staff?" Goodwin demanded.

"You misunderstand, sir. I carry with me an envoy from the hostile armies, who wishes to see the President personally. General Bell, chief in the field, granted this envoy safe conduct, and promised that he should see the President."

"Captain Howard," Goodwin cried,

"if you have brought to this city a man of the enemy who is to propose our capitulation, I'll have you shot for a coward!"

Howard turned white, then walked up close to the other man.

"Perhaps it is not to propose our capitulation!" he thundered.

"What do you mean?" Goodwin cried. "We have won?"

"We have had much the best of the day's fighting, sir. And before you call me a coward again, Captain Goodwin, have the goodness to remember that I have taken my ship and my men across the enemy's field of battle, that my ship has been riddled with shot, that her decks have been washed with blood—while you paced the landing-stage at Washington a thousand miles or so away, out of harm's zone!"

Goodwin sputtered with wrath; finally he spoke.

"You want to see me at the front, eh?" he cried. "You shall see me there soon, sir! You'll see me drive the Asiatics into the sea! But as to your words just now—a court-martial shall decide, sir, between the two of us!"

"I am willing, sir," Captain Howard replied. "And now, if you please, I'll prepare to go to the President. Allow me to suggest, sir, that you make your way to the War Department, for you'll be needed in the council-chamber."

"I make my way where it pleases me best," said the chief of staff.

He walked angrily down the stage, went into the depot, and descended to the street. The news of the day's victory had gone before him. Cheers greeted him as he emerged within sight of the throng.

"You shall have your revenge," he said, stepping out upon a balcony and waving his hands at the thousands below him. "We'll not stop until we've driven the Asiatics from the face of the earth!"

A tempest of cheers greeted his speech. He got into a carriage, and the crowds gave way for it as the driver whipped up the horses. The driver was an old man—he had three sons somewhere in the West, sleeping in army uniforms and in nameless graves. There were tears in the old man's eyes as he guided the horses through the crowded streets.

"He said he'd drive them from the face of the earth," the old driver said to himself. "That means years and years more of war. Years and years more—and a million men have died already!"

CHAPTER II.

"THE SUN SHALL NOT RISE TO-DAY."

ONCE out of the crowd which thronged the streets surrounding the aeroplane depot, the driver lashed his horses into a gallop, and the carriage of the chief of staff dashed through the avenues. Long since, the use of automobiles had been abolished, likewise the use of individual air-craft, for the navy of the air had use for all fuel supplies.

Captain Goodwin lay back against the cushions, his eyes closed, his breath coming in quick gasps. His head pained terribly; his fingers twitched nervously.

Yes—Eperson had been right, he was all unstrung. He didn't feel like himself at all. What were the words he had said to Eperson, to that crowd? Well—no matter! They would amount to nothing. His head felt queer. He wondered whether his mind was giving way under the great strain.

The carriage drew up before the War Department building at last, and a waiting trooper threw open the door. Captain Goodwin passed the soldier without acknowledging his salute, hurried up the steps, and went up to his own office. A sleepy aide sprang to his feet from a chair as the chief of staff entered.

"Anything?" Goodwin snapped.

"Reports from the South and West, sir, but not from the field of battle. We've lost three more ships in the Gulf of Mexico. The German emperor has given out an interview in which he says his fleets are ready to sail in an hour's time, and that unless the United States accepts his offer of help, he may take the initiative and forward his transports to Mexico, having his troops enter the western country across the border."

"He'll hardly do that, I think," Goodwin muttered, smiling.

"The several chiefs and Cabinet officers are in the council-room, sir, awaiting the President."

"Very well."

"You'll go in at once, sir?"

"No!" cried Goodwin. "I'll go when they request my presence!"

The aide looked astonished.

"Very well, sir," he said.

The chief of staff entered his private office, threw open a desk, and took down a file of papers. Again he paused, and placed his hands to his head, as though to stifle the pain that was there.

"I wonder—" he began.

In the outer office there were voices, but the chief of staff gave them no attention. Messengers were always arriving with reports and maps and requisitions for supplies that the department could not grant. Presently some one knocked at his door. The chief of staff did not respond. He felt that he wanted no interruption.

An hour passed; there came another knock at the door.

"Well?" Goodwin cried.

His aide entered and stood before him.

"The President requests your presence in the council-room, sir."

"Tell the President I'll be there in a few minutes," the chief of staff replied.

Again the aide looked astonished, but he carried out the order. Goodwin finished smoking his cigar, rose, and passed through a private door and a private corridor to the council-chamber. He was still angry, still unable to control himself.

He threw open the door and entered the chamber. Without speaking to those assembled, he made his way to his accustomed seat and sat down. He heard the President's voice:

"We have waited some time for you, Captain Goodwin."

"I beg your pardon—there were duties that had to be performed," the chief of staff replied.

He raised his head. The members of the Cabinet were before him, the chiefs of departments of the army and navy. Captain Howard, of the Aragon, was there, too. All were looking at Goodwin.

"Well?" Goodwin asked.

"We have considered everything informally before asking you to join the conference," the President said. "The matter can now be placed before you in a complete state.

"Reports from General Bell, in the

field, tell of the first day's battle—yesterday's—in Central Illinois. We also have reports from Wyoming, where the second army is engaged. These reports were relayed to us by the Aragon. That is the only means of communication remaining, as you well know."

"Well?" asked Goodwin again.

"We have checked the advance of the Asiatics in Illinois, have turned their flank. And in Wyoming we have been successful, too. The greater army of the Asiatic advance, now in Illinois and Wisconsin, may find itself hemmed in by our two armies. Extermination would be possible, of course, in that event.

"But the enemy is outdone, Captain Goodwin. We may now give thanks—for the end of this cruel war is in sight."

"The end? The beginning, you mean!" Goodwin cried, springing to his feet. "Mr. President—and you, gentlemen—I held out all along against asking aid of any European nation, because it was my pride to have it written on history's pages that we conquered unaided. We have conquered—and alone.

"Now, gentlemen, I am in favor of taking the aid of every nation that offers help, of sending thousands of battle-ships and transports to the Asiatic countries, of sending fleets of air-ships, of sending gigantic armies, of putting to the sword and bayonet every Asiatic—man, woman, or child—of exterminating the race. It is the only revenge we can exact!"

"Captain Goodwin," said the President, with sorrow in his voice, "I regret that you speak so. I have had it reported that you uttered such sentiments in public a short time ago. Do you realize what it means? It would be inhuman, a hardship upon our own people.

"Our country is in ruins as far East as Illinois. There is not a town of consequence standing in the West. Corn-fields have been turned into cemeteries these past five years. We are bankrupt. If peace comes now, and the great natural resources of our country are properly conserved, we can be a prosperous nation again in a few years; but the pain and sorrow already caused will endure a century. Think, Captain Goodwin! Would it not be better to end it now—with honor?"

"With honor?" Goodwin cried.

"Yes—with honor. Captain Howard has brought us, on the Aragon, an envoy from the enemy. He is Count Kashuma. He asks us to sign a peace protocol to hold while representatives consider terms of ending this war. Count Kashuma admits that the Asiatics are weary of the useless struggle."

"He comes at an excellent time—now that his armies face defeat," sneered Goodwin. "Why did he not come three months ago, when he was victorious?"

"The man who cries 'enough' is entitled to some consideration," the President replied.

"And he wants a peace protocol, eh?"

"I have said as much, Captain Goodwin."

"I am not in favor of it. I am in favor of calling upon Europe to enter a war of extermination."

"European nations have assured me, within the past few hours, that they, too, want this war to end and trade relations resumed. When we were in danger, they stood ready to help. Now that we are turned conquerors, they request that we accept the chance offered by the enemy. It is a protocol they ask for, captain. If, when the representatives meet, their terms do not suit us, we are at liberty to follow precedent."

"Give them their protocol!" Goodwin cried. "It is now four o'clock in the morning. Send word that peace endures to-day and to-night. But when the sun rises to-morrow morning, the cannon shall roar again, unless in the meantime the Asiatics agree to our demands."

"I am glad that you make even this concession," the President said. "You have been a valuable man, captain, and I should hate to have to disagree with you now. But what can representatives do in twenty-four hours?"

"Anything, when they know they must," said Goodwin.

"Let us have Count Kashuma in," the President said.

An attendant went out, and returned, followed by the count, in uniform.

"Count Kashuma," the President said, "we have been considering your proposition. Captain Goodwin, here, thinks the protocol should endure only until sunrise to-morrow morning."

The Asiatic turned and looked at Goodwin keenly. Then he faced the President and spoke in English in a penetrating tone.

"Your excellency," he said, "it was because we feared something like this that it was requested I see you before you held conference with Captain Goodwin. He is known to our people as a cruel, relentless man, whose methods of warfare are almost inhuman."

"Sir!" Goodwin exclaimed.

The President silenced him with a wave of the hand.

"Continue, Count Kashuma," he said.

"We have fought for five years," the count said, "and with honor to both sides. You Americans are a brave people, a nation of fighters. We of the East are weary of the long war, although, up to the present time, victory has been with us as much as with you. Our women are weeping their hearts away, our treasuries are empty, our homes are wrecked because of absent loved ones, our fields lie idle and the weeds grow in our streets. The great conflict was inevitable, as wise men said half a century ago.

"We have suffered, and you have suffered. Honors have been even. Why not cease this war? Why not let us take our armies away? Why not make terms of peace that will be honorable to both? In days gone by, history tells us, the United States was always ready to enforce peace among the nations of the world. I do not say this in the nature of a rebuke."

"It is a rebuke, justly given and deserved," the President said in a tone of sorrow. He looked across the table at Captain Goodwin. "We have drifted far from our early principles," he added.

"You mean that I am the cause of this change?" the chief of staff asked.

"I did not intimate that, sir," the President responded. "Let us have an end of this! Count Kashuma, go back to your army on the Aragon and communicate with your commanders. Captain Goodwin will communicate with ours immediately. This word shall go forth—that a peace protocol shall endure until sunrise to-morrow morning, that representatives of the Asiatics shall come immediately to this building, under safe conduct, and meet our representatives.

Terms of peace shall be discussed. We will see whether anything can be accomplished under Captain Goodwin's plan."

"It is a short time to discuss the settlement of five years' war," Count Kashuma said.

"Not necessarily," Goodwin put in. "I shall lay terms before you. If you agree—well and good. If you do not—the war continues."

"These terms, I trust, will be honorable to both sides," said the count.

"They shall be what I and the President see fit to make them!" Goodwin answered.

"Captain Goodwin," cried the Secretary of War, "you seem to think you are dictating in this matter. You seem to forget—"

"I forget nothing, sir," Goodwin interrupted. "And I remember that many times you and your colleagues would have acted like cowards and white-livered curs, except for me."

Every man in the room sprang to his feet and glared down at Goodwin. The President walked a step forward.

"Captain Goodwin," he said, "you have insulted a peace envoy here under safe conduct. You have insulted the President of the United States and his Cabinet officers, and you have spoken words which show that you are a man dangerous to the best interests of our country."

"The United States shall not be ruled by a military dictator, sir. I begin to fear that I have trusted you too much already, that I have listened too long to your counsel. Your sword, sir!"

"What do you mean?" Goodwin cried, springing to his feet.

"I mean that you are no longer my chief of staff, that you are no longer an officer of the United States army. I shall appoint a new chief to-morrow."

Goodwin drew his sword, broke it across his knee, and threw the fragments at the President's feet.

"There, sir!" he cried. "I am no longer chief of staff of your army! But I command the army just the same!"

"You mean treason?" cried all, in a breath.

"If it is treason to take things in hand when other men would dishonor the coun-

try, then it is treason. I command the army—it obeys my commands. There shall be no peace protocol! See these—and these!"

He took from his blouse bundles of messages.

"They shall be on their way to the front in ten minutes!" he cried, backing to the door. "The commanders in the field take their orders from me!"

"Stop these messages, countermand these orders, if you can. Place me under military arrest, if you dare! The people are with me in this! At sunrise the cannon shall roar again! I'll wipe the Asiatics from the face of the earth! I'll begin at sunrise this morning!"

He turned and dashed through the door, slammed it shut, leaving them standing there appalled. Unconsciously the President muttered the words the old carriage-driver had used just before:

"And a million men have died already!"

The Secretary of War threw himself into a chair, and sobbed, his overwrought nerves breaking. Other strong men in that room were in tears. Count Kashuma stood to one side of the table, his face showing no emotion.

"He will begin at sunrise this morning," echoed an aide.

"Then the sun shall not rise to-day!" exclaimed a piercing voice from the other door.

CHAPTER III.

"THE WORLD IS STANDING STILL."

ALL turned!

Professor Selester stood there—one of the greatest scientists of the age, honored by scientific men throughout the world, a cousin of the President, and one of the President's household.

He was a little, dried-up man of fifty years. His face was unsoiled by beard, and every bone in it seemed to show through the tightly stretched skin. His eyes—black and piercing—peered forth at them.

"What do you mean, Professor Selester?" one of the group asked.

"I mean exactly what I have said. The sun shall not rise this morning. Do you wish it would not? Do you wish

darkness would shroud the earth to prevent Captain Goodwin carrying out his purpose? He is a man of his word, and he has said he will not renew hostilities until the sun rises. Would you like to know that the sun will not rise until you have time to cope with the situation?"

"If that could only be," sighed the President.

"It can be," replied Professor Selester. "Give the word, if you wish such a thing to come about."

"Are you sane? Do you mean it?" cried the others.

"I am sane—and I mean it. But the President must give the word."

"Why should you await the word from any one? In the name of humanity, do this thing, if you can."

The Secretary of War sprang to his feet.

"We're all insane—all unstrung!" he cried. "What are you talking about? What human being can bid the sun stand still and have it obey?"

"Not the sun, but the earth," replied Professor Selester. He turned again to the President. "Will you give the word, cousin?" he asked.

"What would it mean?"

"It would mean night until matters are adjusted; it would mean a stop to this cruel war until the daylight came again. And the daylight will not come again until you give the word for that, too."

"I mean it will be four o'clock in the morning eternally, until you desire the earth to resume its normal movements. It means eternal day on the other side of the world, of course. Are you willing to take the responsibility, cousin?"

"I am willing to do anything to save my country from further useless bloodshed," replied the President. "If you could only do this thing, hold off the sunrise until we can cope with the situation—"

"I can do it, cousin. I have done other things."

"Yes, yes—we know! The nations of the world have knelt before you and your scientific works. But this—stopping the world in its tracks—"

"That's exactly what I can do," replied Professor Selester. "I can make the world stand still. And when such an event has served its purpose, I can make

the old world continue on her endless journey."

"This is the age of science," said the Secretary of War. "But such a thing as you propose, professor, cannot be done. And if it could, your offer would be worthless now. The time is too short. Sunrise is less than two hours away."

"The time is not too short, for everything is in readiness," the scientist replied. "I have been prepared for several days, waiting until such a thing should be needed. That tower on the hill, which I built last summer, is my workshop. From that tower I can make the world stand still."

"Enough!" the President cried. "Whether you can do this thing, or not, I do not know. But I give the word. If you can delay the rising of the sun, do it. And the rest of us—why, there's no time to be lost. Goodwin—"

"Goodwin is crazed," the Secretary of War said.

"Yes; he is crazed," replied the President. "He is not like himself, has not been for several days. I have noticed it. We must do what we can to prevent him carrying out his purpose. Secure him, if you can; place him in irons, not as a traitor, but as an insane person. He has served his country well up to now. Let us not degrade him."

Professor Selester pushed the Secretary of War to one side, as he said:

"The telephone—I must have it!"

The others made way for him, and he sat down before the instrument.

"Go on with your work," he said to the others. "Pay no attention to me. I'll do my part in this affair. Go ahead and issue your orders to your armies, stop Goodwin—do anything you wish. Everything will be as before, except that the world will stand still."

"We must secure Goodwin," said the Secretary of War.

He beckoned several young officers to him, and issued orders. The Cabinet officers went away, one by one. Presently no one remained except the professor, the President, and Count Kashuma.

"I desire to be alone," the professor said.

The President arose and opened the door to an adjoining room. He motioned for the count to enter.

Professor Selester called a number. A girl's sweet voice answered him.

"Selma?" he asked.

"Yes, father."

"Everything is all right?"

"Yes, father."

"Start the machinery at once, as I showed you."

"You are going to do it, then?"

"It is the only way, daughter. More blood will flow if we do not. Start the machinery—quickly—and reverse the big machine a little, just as I demonstrated. Watch for my return."

"Yes, father."

"Throw the current into the protectors, too, and let no one come near the tower except myself. When I come, let me in if I am alone, but not otherwise. You understand, daughter? Not otherwise."

"I understand, father."

"Throw the switch while I hold the line."

The girl left the instrument at the other end of the wire. In a few moments she was back again.

"I have done it, father."

"And everything is working all right?"

"Yes."

"Keep it so until I return."

"Yes, father."

Professor Selester hung up the receiver, got up from the chair, chuckled to himself and rubbed his hands together in satisfaction.

"We shall see," he muttered. "The world stands still. Very well, we shall see if war continues."

He started to make his way across the big room, walking slowly, his head bent low on his breast, still rubbing his hands. Half-way to the door through which the President and Count Kashuma had disappeared he came to a quick stop. That other door had been thrown open violently.

Captain Goodwin had staggered into the room, his eyes aflame, a smoking revolver in his hand, a bunch of messages in the other. He slammed the door again, and shot the bolt.

"Hounds!" he screamed.

Professor Selester cowered against a table, and Captain Goodwin turned and saw him.

"So! The little scientist!" he cried, his lips twisting into a gruesome smile.

"And what are you doing here? To your kennel, you! This is a place for warriors, not scientists. We want no old women here. Quit the building, or I'll have you shot for a spy!"

Professor Selester did not answer, but tried to walk toward the door. Some one was beating upon the one Goodwin had just entered. There was a storm of cries in the outer corridor. Some of the words made the professor's face turn paler still.

"Well?" the captain cried. "Are you going to leave the building? Shall I pour hot lead into you, you rat?"

"I'll go—I'll go!" the professor muttered.

"Not through that door. The President is in there. And that Asiatic is with him. Not into that door, but out the back way. I'm going in to see the President myself."

"You'll not hurt the President!" Selester screamed.

"Stand out of my way!"

"You'll not hurt—" began Selester.

The outer door fell with a crash, and half a dozen troopers rushed across it and into the room, weapons in their hands. Goodwin turned to face them, firing into the mob. One trooper fell sprawling, coughing blood. But the others came on. A man in front raised his rifle.

"Drop it!" Goodwin cried.

The captain's revolver spoke again, and the man fell beside his comrade.

"At him!" a voice cried.

The opposite door opened, and the President stood framed in it.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "Goodwin, put up that revolver! Put it up!"

The ex-chief of staff whirled on one heel, and raised the weapon.

"As for you—" he screamed.

There was a cry from every throat, a quick dash forward by the foremost of the pursuing troopers, the quick dash of another from one side, a spurt of flame, a cloud of smoke—and then those behind saw the President standing wreathed in smoke, but unharmed, saw Goodwin on the floor in the grasp of two troopers, saw the body of a man lying between the captain and the President—a man who tried in vain to rise to a sitting posture, who pressed one hand to his breast, from which gushed the blood.

It was Professor Selester!

The President gave a cry and bent on his knees beside the wounded man.

"I tried to save you, cousin," the professor muttered.

"A surgeon—a surgeon!" the troopers were crying.

"I tried to save you, cousin."

"But at what a cost," the President said. "And all is lost now. Captain Goodwin sent his orders before the men got to him, so I was just told in the other room. Now you are wounded, and your work—"

The President ceased speaking, for the professor's head had fallen to one side. A military surgeon hurried into the room.

"Here, first," the President directed, pointing to the professor. "Everything depends upon this man."

Goodwin was still struggling with the two troopers, but they soon subdued him.

"Take him to another room, and guard him well," the President directed. "I'll attend to him presently. See that no news of this is spread abroad."

Then they waited for the surgeon's verdict, watched while he gave first aid to the professor's wound. Presently he placed the wounded man back upon the floor, and stood up.

"Well?" the President asked.

"He is badly wounded."

"He will die?"

"There is a chance to save him—if he has good care."

"He must have the best of care. Have him removed to the White House, and assign the best of nurses and physicians. I will telephone ahead myself, and have things in readiness. Take my carriage—it is at the main entrance. We must save him. Everything depends upon him now."

"He is regaining consciousness," a trooper said.

The President bent over his cousin.

"Are you—all right?" the professor asked.

"Yes, yes," the President answered.

"We'll get you well, cousin. Fight to save yourself; that will help the doctors most. We've lost now, but there'll come a better time, perhaps. Captain Goodwin's orders have gone to the front, and the bloodshed will continue for a time. Then—when you are able—we can let

you stop it. God help our country now. A madman is wrecking its ruins!"

"What was it he—what was it Goodwin—said? I—forget."

"He said the battle would be resumed at sunrise, cousin—those were his orders to the front. We can do nothing now."

"Nothing!" cried the wounded man. A wonderful light flashed in his eyes. "We have done everything," he added. "I did it, by telephone, while you were in the other room."

"What do you mean?" the President cried.

"I mean that the sun will not rise this morning. No—even now—the world is standing still!"

CHAPTER IV.

"THE PASS DOES NOT MENTION YOU."

No one but the President heard the words. The chief executive of the nation rose with the light of unbelief in his eyes. He turned and walked to a window as members of the ambulance corps took Professor Selester from the room.

Outside, night prevailed, and the thousands of lights flashed throughout the city. Soldiers hurried through the streets. To the east, where the great aeroplane depot stood, flashes of red and green told that the signalmen were talking with remote corners of the land.

The world was standing still? Everything appeared to be the same! Did Professor Selester speak the truth? Or was he speaking from the land of delirium?

"We shall know soon," the President muttered.

Presently he descended to the street and took another carriage and drove to the White House. Professor Selester had been made as comfortable as possible in a room, and physicians and nurses were in attendance.

"How is he?" the President asked.

"He is unconscious, sir," a physician replied, "but we hope for the best. He has a magnificent body for one so small. His vitality is little less than wonderful. When this unconsciousness is over, we will be able to tell you something more definite. I dislike to make promises now, sir, but everything looks favorable."

The President left the sick-room and went to his private office. He had to consider the appointment of a new chief of staff; he had to attend to the thousand and one things that crowd upon a ruler in time of war. He bent low over his desk, examining papers under the bright light, while an aide stood at his elbow, and his secretary dictated orders on the other side of the room.

An hour passed, then a young officer entered the room quickly and spoke to the aide. The aide touched the President on the arm.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but a young lady wishes to speak to you. I think you will pardon the interruption—she is Professor Selester's daughter."

"Let her come in here at once," the President directed.

He sighed as he dropped the report he was reading and whirled around in his chair. The young officer went out, presently returned, and ushered in the young woman. She was a beautiful girl of twenty, with a wealth of dark hair, and dark eyes that peered into the very soul of one, even as did Professor Selester's.

The President did not know his cousin's daughter very well. She had spent her young womanhood at school, prior to the beginning of the great war, and since the war had begun the President had had little time for his family and for social duties. He recognized her, however, at a glance.

Springing from his chair, he placed an arm round her and led her forward under the light. He raised her head and looked into her eyes.

"You must be brave, little Selma," he said. "He is badly wounded, unconscious now; but there is a chance, the surgeons tell me. Just be as brave as you can."

"I'll try," she replied, her lips trembling. "I cannot see him?"

"I am afraid not," the President replied. "He is unconscious—and even if he were conscious, the shock of seeing you might be fatal. You know how he loves you!"

The girl's head drooped.

"I shall have you called if the physicians say you may see him, or if there is any immediate danger," the President

continued. "How did you learn of your father's wound?"

"An officer notified me, sir."

"You know all the circumstances, little Selma? He suffered to protect me."

"So they told me, sir. Any of us would do that."

"But your father is worth more to his country now, little Selma, than I am. You know—his work—"

The girl raised her head.

"His work?" she echoed.

"I thought you knew—"

"Oh, yes, I know!" she said hastily.

"He told me—just before he lost consciousness—that his work had already been started. He was delirious, of course—"

"Of course," she said, with evident relief.

"You need not leave the house, little Selma. Tell them I said you were to remain here—near your father. Just step into this room, dear. I'll have a surgeon watch, and notify you if you are needed. Try to be brave—in these times all of us must be brave."

"I'll try," she replied.

The President stepped away from her and touched a bell. An officer entered the room.

"Take Miss Selester to my wife's apartments," the President directed. "See that all her desires are obeyed as commands."

The officer saluted, and held open the door. But the girl turned again to the President.

"One moment, sir," she whispered. "It—it was Captain Goodwin—was it not?"

"Yes," the President answered.

"Surely he did not intend to do it, sir."

"Captain Goodwin intended to assassinate me; your father prevented it."

"But, surely, he did not intend that harm to you, either, sir. He must be out of his right mind."

"He is, little Selma. And he has done a great deal of harm. We were unable to prevent it. We do not blame him—the anxiety has crazed him."

"And what have you done with him?"

"He is held prisoner in the Federal prison. We cannot let him free, of course, in his present condition."

"You'll not—execute him?"

"No, Selma. Word has gone out that Captain Goodwin has gone insane through worry and overwork. We merely hold him prisoner. He has served his country well up to now. Heaven grant that he may regain his right mind and be valuable still."

The girl looked away for a moment, then turned back to the President with a look of determination on her face.

"If I could see him"—she began.

"You see him? And why?"

"You do not know," she said. "Captain Goodwin's son, Lieutenant Frank Goodwin, is to be my husband."

"I did not know," the President said. "Lieutenant Goodwin is an excellent officer, little Selma."

"And Captain Goodwin—he thinks a great deal of me, I believe. If I could talk with him—if I could make him realize what he has done—perhaps it would calm him, or change him in some way."

"I am afraid you can do nothing, little girl. He is violent; he has wounded several men. I am having him closely guarded."

"But perhaps some time to-day, sir—"

The President patted her shoulder affectionately.

"I understand," he said. "And what is it you want?"

"Just a pass—or whatever you call it—so those officers will let me talk to him."

"I guess we can arrange that," the President said.

He sat down at his desk for a moment, wrote rapidly, then arose and handed her the pass.

"That will enable you to see him," he said. "But be careful. You had better take some one with you when you go. And I'd rather, under the circumstances, that the 'some one' shouldn't be Captain Goodwin's son."

"I understand, sir."

"Go to my wife now. And I'll have you informed of your father's condition every little while."

"Thank you, sir," the girl said.

She walked through the door the aide held open and passed down the great corridor.

"Kindly step in here, Miss Selester," the aide directed. "The President's wife has been up since your father was injured, and I'll have her come to you at once."

The girl entered the room, and the officer bowed himself out.

As soon as he was gone, the girl rushed to the door again and looked up and down the corridor, then fled swiftly toward a side door. In a few moments she had emerged into the open air and was walking rapidly through the darkness, making her way to the street.

A carriage awaited her. She sprang into it, the driver whipped up his horses, and they sped down the street. Three blocks away the carriage slowed down, and a man in military uniform sprang in it and sat down beside the girl.

"You got it?" he asked roughly.

"Yes."

"Good! Any trouble?"

"None—he never noticed."

"Good again. That's so much the better. We will gain time."

The carriage continued its racing through the streets. Neither the girl nor the man beside her spoke.

Presently the driver stopped his horses before a great building.

"We're at the prison," the man said then. "Now, remember yourself, and if you make a mistake—"

"I'll not make a mistake," the girl said with some impatience.

"And if young Goodwin puts in an appearance—"

"I'll attend to him, if he does."

"You have the pass ready?"

"I have it here."

The man sprang out and helped her to alight. Together they walked up to the main entrance. The soldier on duty there saluted.

"We wish to see the commandant," the man beside the girl said.

"The commandant is busy now, sir."

"We cannot wait. We hold a pass from the President. It is imperative this business of ours."

"Very well, sir. This way."

The soldier turned them over to another, and they were ushered into a waiting-room. It was several minutes before the commandant entered. During that time the man stood before the win-

dow, looking down at the street, and the girl sat before the fireplace, staring at her feet. Presently the commandant appeared. The man whirled to meet him.

"Colonel Olgen," he said, "I am Captain Richard Testnor, of the Austrian army, the military representative of my country here. This young lady is Miss Selma Selester, daughter of Professor Selester, who was shot and wounded a short time ago by Captain Goodwin.

"I have the honor to be her escort. She has a pass from the President, which authorizes her to see and speak with Captain Goodwin, who is one of your prisoners, as we understand it."

Colonel Olgen bowed, and took the pass from the girl's cold hand. He examined it carefully.

"It is perfectly regular," he said. "Kindly make yourselves as comfortable as possible for a few minutes."

He turned and left the room; the man flashed a look of satisfaction at the girl. In a few minutes Colonel Olgen returned.

"You may see him now," he said, speaking to the girl. "I have informed him of your coming; and he seems surprised, but delighted. I hope you can do something, Miss Selester, to restore his bright brain to its normal condition. He is a valuable man when he is sane—a very dangerous man when he is not."

Colonel Olgen held open the door, and the girl swept past him into the dark corridor. From the distance came the cries of the sentries, the rattling of chains within the prison. She hung back a little as she passed from the room.

Captain Testnor stepped forward quickly, but Colonel Olgen barred the way.

"I beg your pardon, Captain Testnor," he said. "But the pass did not mention you. You will kindly remain behind. Await us here."

CHAPTER V.

DICTATOR OF THE UNITED STATES.

CAPTAIN TESTNOR'S lips curved in a sarcastic smile.

"Very well," he said, and turned back into the room.

The door was closed behind him and bolted, and Colonel Olgen led the way down the dark corridor, the girl following closely.

"Daylight seems to be slow in coming this morning," the commandant said. "Is your father badly injured?"

"The surgeons say he has a chance, sir."

"I hope he recovers; he is a great man."

"Thank you, sir," the girl answered.

She waited beside the commandant while a guard opened a door and allowed them access to another corridor. They walked on and on, past rows and tiers of cells, past guards that paced back and forth ceaselessly.

The girl did not raise her eyes to meet those that peered at her from behind rows of bars. She clutched at the commandant's arm and hurried on beside him.

"Here," the commandant directed.

She raised her eyes then. Captain Goodwin's face was before her, separated from her by the bars. It was pale, and the perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"Little Selma," he muttered.

"I have come to see you—yes. The President gave me a pass."

"They tell me I wounded your father."

"Yes."

"You know I didn't mean to harm him, little Selma. It was the President my bullet was for. Your father tried to save the President."

"I know," the girl said.

"He will live?"

"There is a chance."

"And you came to see me—after I had wounded your father?"

"Yes."

"Where is Frank? Is he with you?"

"He is not with me; I do not know where he is; but in the city some place, I think."

Captain Goodwin placed his hands to his head.

"Little Selma," he said, "I believe I have been insane. I think I am insane still. I feel strangely, and I must have acted strangely. But always remember that I never meant to harm your father."

"I know you did not."

"And now I will die like a dog, I suppose—be shot against a wall, because I tried to kill the President. I didn't know what I was doing, little Selma. But they wanted to stop me—just as I was gaining victory. They wanted to end the war, give the Asiatics all the glory and honor, after we had suffered so much to win!"

"You'll not be shot against a wall," she whispered. "The President will not have you executed."

"He told you that?"

"Yes—he told me that. Put your hand down close to mine. There—take that key. Now—when I stand between you and Colonel Olgen, unlock the door of your cell."

"What do you mean?" Goodwin whispered hoarsely as he took the key.

"Do not ask questions. Do just as I tell you. Are you listening?"

"Yes—but what does it mean?"

"Listen! There is no one in this corridor except Colonel Olgen. I'll call to him as you grasp my arm through the bars, and when he comes running up burst out of your cell and seize him. You understand? Gag him and lock him in the cell. There is not a prisoner nearer than ten cells of you, and not one of them can see what takes place. They've got you at the turn in the corridor."

"But why—"

"Don't ask questions. Can't you trust me—the girl your son is going to marry?"

"I trust you, little Selma—of course. But—"

"Listen! Then we'll walk from this prison—I have the President's pass. A carriage is waiting. It is almost daylight. We'll get you away quickly, help you escape; and, once you are free, you can send your orders to your armies, and have them strike. Do you understand now?"

"You are helping me to escape?" Goodwin asked strangely. "You are helping me so I can go on with my work of driving the Asiatics from the earth?"

"Yes—yes!"

"But, why?"

"Can't you understand, Captain Goodwin? There are men in authority who

look at things as you do. You can do nothing while you are a prisoner, and they know it. They arranged this way of freeing you—and I got the pass from the President because my father is his cousin. Can't you see it now?"

"Ah! You are helping me because you love my son?"

"You see now, do you not?" she asked, drawing back.

"Yes."

"Be quick, then—do as I said."

She bent nearer the bars of his cell. Suddenly one of his hands shot through the bars, and he grasped her. The girl uttered a cry of fright, loud enough for Colonel Olgen to hear and understand, but not loud enough to rouse the other prisoners or the guards.

The commandant sprang forward quickly, reached the girl's side, attempted to grasp Goodwin's hand. In that instant the captain's hand released its hold on the girl and was withdrawn.

"Come away quickly, Miss Selester!" the commandant said. "I was afraid something like this might happen. You see, he is not in his right mind."

The commandant placed an arm round the girl, turned her, and started away from the cell, down the corridor. His back was turned, and before he had taken three steps Goodwin had thrown open the unlocked door and had dashed from the cell.

His hands met in a firm grip round the commandant's throat, his knee was at the commandant's back, and Colonel Olgen went down upon the floor without uttering a sound.

"Good," the girl whispered. "Now—into the cell with him! Gag him, too!"

Captain Goodwin knelt upon the commandant's chest, choking the man into insensibility. Finally he got upon his feet, picked up the insensible commandant, and carried him to the cell, placing him on the floor. The captain locked the door and returned the key to the girl.

"He will be insensible for several minutes," Goodwin said.

She was already leading the way down the corridor. They made the turn in safety, and presently came to the door leading to the other corridor. The girl knocked; the guard outside opened the

slot and saw her, and swung open the great door. He appeared astonished to see Goodwin in place of the commandant.

"Where is Colonel Olgen?" he asked.

Goodwin opened his mouth to speak, but the girl was quicker.

"He stopped to speak with some poor prisoner," she said. "We are to go directly to the commandant's office, Captain Goodwin and I. I brought a paper from the President for Captain Goodwin's release."

She smiled at the soldier sweetly. The man looked at Goodwin, fell back a step, and saluted.

"I meant no offense, sir," he said. "It—it appeared unusual."

"You but did your duty," the captain replied. "I shall remember you."

Then he led the way down the big corridor, leaving behind him a young soldier with visions of promotion because of duty well performed before the chief of staff.

They came to the office-door, and Captain Goodwin unbolted it and threw it open. With the girl, he rushed in, and closed the door behind him.

Captain Testnor was waiting for them.

"Quick!" he cried. "The carriage is ready. We must lose no time!"

Goodwin whirled upon him.

"Who are you, sir?" he questioned.

"Captain Testnor, the Austrian attaché, sir. I am acting with Miss Se-lester in this matter, for some others. They might have mistrusted us, sir, had your son accompanied her. Pray, lose no time!"

He had crossed the room and thrown open the door. He led the way down the steps, running, Goodwin following him, the girl coming last. The man on guard outside the door was brushed to one side like a broken toy. Before he could regain his senses, the carriage had started, the horses were dragging it at a mad pace through the streets.

Inside the prison, the commandant came back to life slowly. When consciousness returned he sat up on the floor of the cell and tried to realize what had happened. The next instant his shriek roused the prison and brought the guards.

Explanations took but a moment. As they rushed toward the office, they met the outside sentry rushing back to them.

"They've gone — escaped!" he cried. "They rushed from the inside and hurled me off the steps. Before I could get up, they were gone."

"How?" the commandant demanded quickly.

"In a carriage, sir. They drove down the street."

The commandant rushed to his office, and the alarm was given.

"That girl held a pass signed by the President," he said. "I cannot understand this business. Did they go together, man?"

"Yes, sir. The captain was being aided, I tell you. That other man—the foreign officer—seemed to be directing them. It all happened so quickly—"

"Yes—yes," the commandant interrupted. "That will do. To your posts, all of you!"

They left him, and he called an officer. For several moments he sat before his desk, listening to the alarm within the prison.

"A funny business," he repeated. "The President shall know of it at once."

He began writing a personal report to the President.

And meanwhile the carriage containing Captain Goodwin, Captain Testnor, and the girl drove madly through the streets to the outskirts of the city. Several times the driver changed his route.

"Where are we going?" Goodwin demanded.

"To a place we have prepared, sir," Testnor replied. "Everything has been well arranged."

The carriage drew up before an old house set well back from the street. Captain Testnor got out and helped the girl. Captain Goodwin followed them up the walk, up the front steps, to the door. Testnor knocked, a peculiar signal of a knock. The door was opened by a middle-aged man in civilian dress. Testnor led the way into the house, without speaking to the man who opened the door.

They entered a large room off from the hall. The lamps were burning, but opaque curtains kept the gleams from penetrating to the darkness outside.

In the center of the room was a long, wide table, and about it sat a dozen men.

As the three entered, these men sprang to their feet. Each held a glass of liquor in his hand. Testnor guided Goodwin to the head of the table.

"What have we here?" Goodwin demanded.

He glanced down the table. He knew them all. There was Count Bernstein, the German attaché at Washington; M. Elliton, a French secret-service agent; Captain-General Torocco, of Spain, and the others—

Yes, he knew them all! There were a couple of Russians, too, who had been in Washington since the war began, and an Italian lieutenant, a Mexican officer even.

But there was not an American, and not an Englishman, in that room!

"Well, what does all this mean?" Goodwin cried again.

He turned to look at the girl. She

had stepped back, and stood near the door, as though this was a scene in which she had no part.

Count Bernstein, the German, arose at the other end of the table; he alone of them all had retained his seat at Goodwin's entrance. The German held his glass above his head, and the others did the same.

"Gentlemen," he said, "drink with me to Captain Goodwin, an able officer who has been misunderstood and wronged. Drink with me, gentlemen, to Captain Goodwin, who commands the armies and navies of the United States in spite of his personal enemies—"

"Not the navies," laughed Goodwin.

"The navies, as well as the armies!" Bernstein cried. "I call upon you, gentlemen, to drink with me to Captain Goodwin, *Dictator of the United States of America!*"

(To be continued.)

WALLOPS.

By Edgar Franklin.

WHY insist on love for your dog as well as for yourself, if your dog doesn't love you?

OUTDOORS, in the cold world, a slow, grayish drizzle was drowning every chance of human cheer. It dripped drearily from the fire-escapes up-stairs and splashed swashily on the concrete pavement under the back windows of the first flat. It trickled malevolently down the panes that mother had burnished only yesterday.

Indoors, in the warm, smoky kitchen, ominous, invisible things lurked in the air—things more ominous than the foggy monotone without—which Robert Henry could feel, yet which, despite the wisdom of his full twelve years, he could not name.

Robert Henry's first suspicion had been roused when the doughnut-frying began;

and Robert Henry's mother went to the length of cooking three of the "holes" for him, and putting them beside him on one of the little green-flowered plates, where he lingered over a highly uninteresting book.

Not that Robert Henry's mother was neglectful, but this solicitous proceeding on a Friday afternoon argued that she wished to be particularly motherly and nice. On sweeping day, delicate little attentions like the frying of doughnut-holes, all unrequested, are rather rare; and the green plate was queer, too, in its own little green way. Those plates usually appeared in public only when there was a conjunction of company and cake!

So that Robert Henry munched his doughnut-holes and pondered rather sadly. There was a nameless something in the air, and that something had a pointed and direct reference to himself and his personal affairs.

Nor was there a doubt about the last; Robert Henry's mother was smiling at

him now in a way he had not noticed since the night the doctor said he might be coming down with scarlet fever.

Robert Henry's mother was sorry for him—and why on earth was she sorry? Not because of indoor confinement in rainy weather; for Robert Henry had spent many afternoons indoors without getting that smile. Not because the baseball game to-morrow afternoon—in which Robert Henry was to pitch—would have to be postponed, probably, on account of rain; for Robert Henry's mother had no particular sympathy with baseball. Not because—

And just here meditation was cut short, because Wallops entered!

Wallops was an individuality on four legs.

He owned a body that was either fox-terrier, bulldog, Irish setter, Scotch collie, dachshund, Pomeranian, or St. Bernard—or a composite of all. He displayed a tail of such length that, but for a saving upward curl toward the middle, it must surely have been worn to the bone by friction with unfeeling pavements many months before Wallops left his canine childhood behind.

As regarded countenance, Wallops might have been rather pleasing to any one save a dog fancier. His large brown eyes were soft and friendly, and seemed to appeal for anything that might be going in the way of stray second-hand bones.

His head had started with the intention of being broad and imposing, and then changed its mind and favored the tapering, sharp-snouted trend. But for his markings, too, Wallops would have been beautifully marked. One eye held a black circle; one eye held a dark-brown circle; and down the long nose ran a streak of brilliant fawn color.

But what Wallops mostly held at present was the chenille table-cover.

He held it firmly in his strong young jaws, as he looked with genial inquiry from Robert Henry to his mother. Robert Henry's mother looked back with a complete, frigid lack of geniality.

That table-cover—the table-cover in which Wallops had already chewed three long, jagged holes—was a very nice table-cover. It had cost five dollars and ninety-eight cents at a very marked bar-

gain sale, and in its original shape it had been a source of justified pride to Robert Henry's mother.

Mrs. Welkins, next door, had paid eleven dollars for a cover not nearly so ornamental; and when Robert Henry's mother saw this particular cover dragged through the swinging door that connected dining-room and kitchen—

The heavy draining-spoon had missed Wallops by the merest fraction of an inch!

The cover remained on the floor. Wallops shot under the table beside Robert Henry. He crept straight into the dark space beneath Robert Henry's chair and crouched low as Robert Henry's mother cried:

"Papa was quite right, Bobby! That dog—"

"What, mother?" asked Robert Henry.

"Nothing. Put him out in the yard, Bobby."

"Aw, it's all wet out there!" protested Robert Henry.

"Well, he can go in his house."

"I know, but his house leaks. It's all soppy inside, and—"

"Put that dog out!"

Robert Henry rose and started dismally for the cellar with:

"Come on, Wallops!"

Wallops left the flat without protest. When you happen to be a dog and have made the insane mistake of eating a chenille table-cover, it is just as well to disappear as rapidly as possible, after your mistake is confirmed.

Wherefore, Wallops trotted dutifully down-stairs and to the yard, with Robert shuffling ahead. And when they were there, Robert Henry pointed to the shack, constructed of aged carpet and bits of soap-box, and said sternly:

"Git in there, you!"

Wallops turned and licked his master's hand, humbly and slowly; and Robert Henry gulped hard. More and more, it was growing on him that the mysterious something bore upon Wallops, all alone out there in his leaky shed.

Robert Henry returned to the first flat and thought anew. The family was sore on Wallops; he felt that. But what were they going to do to Wallops? What were they going—just here the

key clicked in the outer door and Robert Henry turned up the light and bent over a book.

It pleased his father to see Monday's lessons being disposed of on Friday. Wherefore Robert Henry was wholly unaware that any one had peeked through the curtains while he hummed monotonously something about A-square plus X-square equalling—

Possibly thirty minutes later a bass voice called:

"Dinner is ready, Robert!"

Robert Henry made his way to the family board and ate dutifully of good things—and the something remained in the air. It seemed to hover—to flit elusively—to nag one from behind. It lurked over the soup; it played invisibly about the steak; it capered, all unseen, about the pie! And, then, as mother was taking out the dishes, a wildly dismal howl rose from the back yard—and the crisis swept down the stretch!

"Robert! Is that that confounded dog?" demanded his father.

"Yes, sir."

"What does he want?"

"I—guess he wants to come in."

"Let him in."

Robert Henry opened the window obediently. With a bound, Wallops arrived, being entirely careful to wipe his muddy paws on the couch-cover as he passed. Robert Henry's father surveyed Wallops with an expression that did not send up the smoke of burning cordiality.

Wallops, however, looked at Robert Henry's father with a with-malice-toward-none expression. Wallops wished to be sociable and friendly, for he wagged his tail and sniffed his teary nose as he waited for a consoling pat. The consoling pat did not come. Robert Henry's father took a last look at the canine member of the household; then:

"Where did you get that beast, Robert?"

"I—found him, sir."

"Where?"

"Four blocks up, round the corner."

"Who does he belong to?"

"I dunno!" said Robert Henry hotly, reverting to the primitive. "There was a kid knocking the punk out of him with a stick, an' I gave him a couple o' lamps an' took the dog an'—"

"Robert!"

"Well, I mean, a big feller was licking him—he was giving him the darnedest wallops you ever saw, dad—and that's why I named him that—and he's only been here a week, and now he can—"

"Very well. That's enough."

Mr. Robert Henry, Sr., caressed his cigar, while Wallops unostentatiously removed a napkin to beneath-table spaces and set about its careful assimilation. Robert Henry himself sat back and waited. He knew it was coming. It came.

"Robert!"

"Yes, sir."

"You are old enough now to know that no one under the sun would wish less to interfere with your pleasures than I, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you realize that if there was anything I could do to forward your pleasures, I'd do it. But this thing of dogs—"

"Yes—sir?" said Robert Henry breathlessly.

"Well, you'll have to get rid of that puppy, Bob. I'm sorry. I really am. If there was any place to keep him, I wouldn't say a word," said Robert Henry's father. "But there's not, and he seems to be raising the dickens around the house, your mother tells me. You'll have to take him and lose him, Bob!"

"But, he ain't got any other home!" Robert Henry protested desperately.

"I know it." Possibly the expression of Robert Henry's father softened a trifle.

"But a flat is no place for a dog, Bob, and if you can't find any one that wants him, take him to the S. P. C. A. and—"

"And have Wallops drowned?" Robert Henry demanded wildly.

Robert Henry's father avoided his eyes and stared at the "Pharaoh's Horses" on the opposite wall.

"I know it's tough, son," he said gently. "I was a boy myself, about a million years ago; but we can't have the pup destroying everything in the house, and—" Here, Robert Henry's mother entered. "To-morrow is Saturday, Robert," concluded his father with commendable sternness, "and you will have to get rid of that dog before to-morrow night!"

Robert Henry slept in the back bedroom—the one from which, when one felt lazy, one could lie in bed and watch the breakfast preparations in the dining-room through the connecting window.

Robert Henry watched no breakfast preparations that fateful Saturday morning. He awakened very early indeed. Wallops was wailing out a melancholy dirge all his own, out in the hut, which remained soggy despite the sunshine; and Robert Henry arose—in the neighborhood of five—and opened the dining-room window cautiously.

Wallops entered damply and licked his master's hands. Robert Henry placed Wallops on the couch and wept silently over him. We would not have done it if father and mother had been up and moving; but at the moment good plain, old-fashioned grief was tearing Robert Henry's young soul; and he put his arms around Wallops's unlovely neck and just cried good and hard and plenty.

And, presently, Wallops and his master went to sleep together on the couch.

Robert Henry's father came out somewhere around seven, and looked over the combination of wet dog and goose-fleshed, pink-pajamaed boy; and after Robert Henry's father had covered them with a blanket and put on the tea-kettle, he went back to the big bedroom and said:

"Say—Mary!"

"Well?" Robert Henry's mother was fixing her hair.

"Couldn't the kid keep his pup?"

"He certainly could—if you'll have your salary raised high enough to pay for the damage he does."

"But—"

"Bob, there is no place for that or any other animal in this household, and you know it perfectly well. I don't want to hurt Bobby, but that dog is getting to be—"

Robert Henry's father sighed.

"All right. I suppose I'll have to shoulder the authority end of it, Mary. Hurry up. I'm late!"

Breakfast.

Robert Henry's father finished his two eggs and his two pieces of toast and his cup of coffee. Then he turned to Robert Henry with:

"You remember what I said about that dog last night, Bobby?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't forget it during the day."

"No, sir."

Robert Henry swallowed aloud. Wallops, absent-mindedly, removed the cover of the couch and then sat up to beg for a piece of Robert Henry's bacon. He received Robert Henry's entire allotment in one handful—and, strangely, neither parent saw the proceeding. Quite intently, they were studying the two sections of the morning paper.

Wallops looked round thoughtfully when the bacon was gone. He walked up to the side of Robert Henry's father and insinuated his nose under one hand. Robert Henry's father scratched an ear almost affectionately, and gave a side-long glance at the unhappy animal.

The animal looked up and emitted a queer little sound of appreciation—and Robert Henry's father rose suddenly.

"Twenty minutes after eight!" he announced crisply. "I'll have to hurry!"

His coat and hat were on the chair. He slipped into them with more than usual speed and straightened up. Whereupon Robert Henry's mother said injudiciously:

"Go to the door with dad, Bobby."

Robert went. So did Wallops, trailing behind cheerfully. Robert Henry went, also, to the extreme length of slipping one small boy hand into his father's and squeezing tight; and when they came to the door at the end of the private hall, Robert Henry mumbled:

"Hey, pop!"

"What is it, sonny?"

"Doncher think I could—maybe if I teased mother—keep the pup, dad? I can fix him up a new house and keep him in the yard, an'—"

"Well, darn it! I don't see why you can't—" and Robert Henry's father straightened up abruptly. "Never use language like that, Robert!" he said sternly. "I'm—I'm late and—er—nervous and—you do just what mother says, Robert, and—good-by!"

He shot into the outer hall, and:

"Papa!" went after him desperately.

"And here's ten cents. Catch!" said the parent, as he sent the coin spinning through the air and fled.

Robert Henry returned to the dining-room and sat down, and Wallops climbed more or less gracefully on his lap.

"Mother?" said Robert Henry.

"Well?"

"Do—do I have to get rid of Wallops?"

"Yes," said his mother. "And if you want to play in that ball game, the sooner you start the better."

Wallops took the push as a hint and dropped to the floor with a heavy thud. Robert Henry shuffled into his room and found his cap. It hung on his right ear now, and Robert Henry's shoulders rounded somewhat and his hands went into his pockets. Robert Henry felt that he was growing incensed at his mother and that policy dictated a quick exit.

"'Mon, Wallops!" he said. And he added inaudibly, "'By, mother!"

"When are you coming home, dearie?" followed him up the private hall.

"Dunno!" said Robert Henry savagely, as the door slammed behind him.

Robert Henry's mother watched him from the shelter of the lace curtains in the parlor-window. Robert Henry was standing on the curb, studying a silver dime intently; while Wallops stood on his hind feet and braced his forepaws against Robert Henry, wagging his tail furiously, in a frantic effort to see what the hand contained.

Robert Henry's mother said: "Hang the old curtains and things! I'm going—" which was not at all ladylike. Then she raised a double knuckle to rap on the window and recall Robert Henry. Then she sighed and her hand fell. When you buy six-dollar table-covers out of a twenty-eight-dollar salary, they are too expensive to be served as puppy-cakes!

First, there was the grocer on the corner.

Any really good, up-to-date grocer needs a dog. A dog is an ornament to a grocery-store. He makes friends. He stimulates trade and awakens lasting interest among the customers. But this was no up-to-date grocer. This was a plain, cheap man, who laughed outright at the offer of Wallops, threw him a diseased ham-end and wanted to know what

Robert Henry's mama wanted for the Sunday order—and please hurry, because there were three ladies waiting.

Robert Henry stalked out with Wallops, the to-be-lost trotting inquiringly at his heels. Next? A butcher won't have a dog. All the things that might interest a dog are sold at so much a barrel, when the man comes around each week. And again—next? Well, there was the lady that had the fancy-store. Any little notion-store must need a dog for protection. Robert Henry entered with confidence begotten of many months of trade in the way of thread and elastics and so on.

Wallops broke the possibly celestial combination by chasing the store cat up the hot stove-pipe. As a side issue, he overturned a large, pasteboard box of baby ribbon in his flight.

When Robert Henry quite regained his breath, they were on the street and the door had been slammed behind them, and Wallops was barking furiously through the glass.

"Well, we'll beat it for a new neighborhood!" said Robert Henry fiercely. "We'll get you a home or—or we'll go out West together, or—or something. Come on!"

Wallops followed reluctantly. They went up the avenue now, lingeringly. They came to the little park, where wild young children and tame old men were wont to disport themselves on sunny days. They spent a good two hours there, while Robert Henry wandered back and forth and talked to the elder members of the company. None of them wanted a really good dog; none of them, indeed, wanted a dog of any kind at any price—and the noon whistle blew and Robert Henry and Wallops were still together and roaming the avenue again!

Twelve—and the game was called at two! Well, the game could go plumb to blazes! Wallops was whining, in his own sweet peculiar way—the way which meant that the Wallopien internal economy was approaching a vacuum. Wallops had to be fed first and homed afterward; and Robert Henry walked into a delicatessen-shop and demanded the maximum of bologna procurable for ten cents. It was ample. It was sliced thin! It was done up in nice waxed

paper and handed over the counter with the smile that is likely to greet the first visit of a strange little boy in the neighborhood. It was even accompanied by the gift of several *pfennussen*!

Then Robert Henry gave the delicatessen gentleman food for meditation, by sitting down on the curb and opening the dainty package, while Wallops settled hungrily beside him.

"You gotter have your lunch, mutty," choked Robert Henry, as he passed an arm about the four-legged member. "I can git my dinner home t'-night, but you—"

He fed forth the slices. Wallops disposed of them and expressed gratitude by divers greasy licks upon the cheeks. A matter of three minutes and lunch was over, and Robert Henry was rising stiffly, while Wallops licked his own chops.

Now? Robert Henry shuffled on—and on—and on. And at last they came to engine-house eighty-seven. There was the engine, harness and all, visible through the open doors; there was a man sitting at a desk, while little bells above him tinkled thrillingly. Robert Henry dived desperately under the heavy chain at the door and Wallops followed. The blue-uniformed man looked up with astonishment as Robert Henry cried:

"Hey! Does this company want a dog?"

"Do we—what?"

Wallops filled the gap neatly. He rose on his hind legs and deftly removed the half-eaten sandwich from the desk; and in the course of some two or three seconds the blue-uniformed man leaned back and roared heartily.

"Is he trained to do that?" he asked.

"He ain't trained for anything," said Robert Henry earnestly, "but he's the best dog and the smartest dog you ever—"

At this point, a man in somewhat imposing uniform came down-stairs, violating all traditions of the brass pole. The man was yawning; the person at the desk grinned and asked:

"Do we want a new dog, chief?"

"Huh?"

"Sallie died last week, you know, and this kid—"

"Hey, chief!" said Robert Henry,

soaring to the heights of the palpitating emergency. "This dog's mine an' m-mother won't let me keep him. He ain't got no home! I gotter find him a home. I asked this gent—"

Wallops detected a trace of butter on the chief's thumb and licked it away conscientiously, meanwhile giving his nicest little whine of thanks. The chief stared at him and, by the grave of heaven—laughed!

"We'll give him a home, son!" he said.

"And can I come and see him sometimes?"

"Surest thing you know, kid!"

Whereupon there was a peal from the big gong over the desk and a district call began. Horses stamped from their stalls. Men came down the poles. There was a hiss of steam and a clatter of wheels and:

"You git outer the way, kid!" yelled the imposing man, as he climbed into his little buggy.

Robert Henry made the sad break of returning too early from Sunday-school. The man up-stairs heard him when he rang, and he listened; for Robert Henry had confided some of his soul-soreness to the man up-stairs last night on the stoop.

"Can I stay out a while, mother?" Robert Henry inquired.

"If you do not leave the steps."

"A'right." Robert Henry turned away.

"Have you been to Sunday-school?"

"Mmmm."

"Did you put your five cents in the box?"

"Mmmm."

"Does that mean yes or no?"

"Well, I—didn't!" Rebellion rose to the surface, albeit Robert Henry stared at the carpet.

"Why not?" The tone turned harsh. "What did you do with it?"

"Candy!" said Robert Henry.

"That nickel was given you to give to God, Robert," his mother replied quietly. "That five cents—"

"Aw—say! I was hungry, an' God wasn't!" returned Wallops's late owner as he headed for the open air.

Possibly, the ill-judged laugh of

Robert Henry's father caused the door to close suddenly. At all events, Robert Henry reached the steps without further interference and sat down.

He stood up again as quickly, for down the street, the clanging of bells was raising the echoes, and the shouts of people and the galloping of hoofs; and the policeman on the corner was waving back the cars—and a dog was barking wildly! And Robert Henry knew that bark as well as he knew his own name.

The engine and the wagon and the chief's buggy took the tracks and roared and clamored on toward Robert Henry's house in wild procession. Up, up the engine horses, a long-tailed dog all but somersaulted in his frenzy, as he raced and barked beside the team.

It was Wallops fast enough, and he was coming straight for his late master—and his back was turned squarely toward Robert Henry and his house, and—

"Wallops!" cried Robert Henry.

The bell clanged. The whistle blew. The horses hammered on—and Wallops barked and turned never one glance toward his late home.

"Wallops!" roared Robert Henry.

The near horse turned for a second

and gave a friendly bite in Wallops's direction; and Wallops shrieked out gleeful barks as he careered through the air.

"Wallops!" screamed Robert Henry.

The window behind Robert Henry opened and his mother's voice said quite plainly above the din:

"You must not run to fires on Sunday, Robert! Remember that!"

As the man up-stairs appeared in his shirt-sleeves, Robert Henry's eyes were glued to the quickly departing figure of the forgetful, the faithless one. It was all over. In one brief twenty-four hours.

Forgotten was the wasted wealth of affection and the stolen bones and the carpet shed and all the rest. It had been the very best thing Robert Henry could do for Wallops's comfort—and it was forgotten. Forgotten, too, was the aged blanket. Forgotten was the twenty-five-cent collar with the big studs, which had left just three cents in the tin bank.

Wallops was a fire-dog now; he had no further use for Robert Henry. Wallops had forgotten, and—

"Hey! Where's my algebra, mother?" muttered Robert Henry, as he stumbled into the flat. "I ain't going to run to any fires!"

RAGNAR THE BOLD.

By Kenneth Bruce.

RAGNAR the Bold, with his viking crew,
Has come from the northern sea;
Fair hamlets smoke on the English coast,
And the inland towns will blaze, they boast,
For 'tis grim Thor's decree.

Up with the sail and the black-crossed flag!
Cover the boat with shields!
Drink to the soul of the viking true,
To the God of the winds and the waters blue,
And death to the foe that yields!

Ragnar the Bold, in the captured hall,
Feasted his light-haired crew;
'Mid the clang of sword and shield, the song
Of a hoary scald rose weird and strong,
Inspired by victory new.

Ragnar the Bold, with his warriors slain,
Stood on the bloody shore;
"Valhalla, my home, my all!" he cried,
Rushed on encircling spears, and died
Amid the battle roar.

PRINCE OF APACHES.

By Frank Lillie Pollock.

The story of two men who went on a love-chase up and down
dim Parisian boulevards and into the dens of Montmartre.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

COUNT COURVOIE, the last of an excellent old family in Paris, but a black sheep, with an unenviable record and now a fortune-hunter, comes to America to catch an heiress. Williams, erstwhile American detective in Paris, recognizes him, and learns that the Frenchman is making up to Laura Wainwright, daughter of the rich Henry Wainwright, president of the Madison Life. With Penfield Carr, a young man enamored of Laura, he tries to stop the count's attentions, but without much success. Suddenly Laura and her father leave New York, dropping quite out of sight. After weeks of worry, Williams receives a cablegram, saying that Laura Wainwright is alone in Paris. He and Carr immediately go to Paris. They are told at the Grand Hôtel that no one by the name of Wainwright has been at the hotel that spring.

CHAPTER VII (*continued*).

FOUND.

THIS blank, crushing disappointment struck us almost dumb. I did not know what to make of it. We recovered sufficiently to insist on the presence of our friends in the hotel.

We changed from English to French, to avoid any mistake of mispronunciation; and, indeed, we pronounced the name of our friends in every manner in which it could possibly be distorted by a French tongue.

It was no use. They had apparently never heard the name. And, so far as I knew, there was no other Grand Hôtel in Paris.

"That cablegram must have been a mere blind. Count Courvoie is somehow at the bottom of this!" Carr exclaimed aside to me.

Strangely enough, I had scarcely thought of the Apache count since I had sailed. Carr's remark seemed suddenly to illumine the whole affair and to bring the count to my mind.

"By thunder, you may be right! There's a deeper mystery here than we've suspected!" I exclaimed. "We'd better

get a room here, though, while we look round."

So we wrote our names in the register, and were at once assigned to rooms on the next floor.

"Ah, M. Williams — of New York," said the clerk, scrutinizing my name. "You are expected. There is a lady here who wishes to see you as soon as you arrive."

"What's her name?" I demanded, startled at this development.

"Mme. Henry."

I did not know it, but I requested to be shown to the lady's presence instantly, and Carr went with me. A *valet de chambre* took us up-stairs, along a corridor, and knocked at a door. I hardly know now whom I expected to see, for my mind was full of Count Courvoie at the moment; but the door suddenly opened, and there, before us, stood Laura Wainwright.

"Mr. Williams — Mr. Carr — you, too!" she exclaimed, and faltered, turning pale.

We stepped quickly inside the room and, shutting the door carefully behind us, turned to her.

"I can't tell you how glad I am—" she began tremulously, hesitated, choked,

and then flung herself on my neck in a tempest of sobbing.

"Uncle Bob! Oh, Uncle Bob!" she moaned.

CHAPTER VIII.

FIL-DE-FER.

I PATTED her shoulder gently and tried to soothe her.

"There, there, child," I said. "Cry, if you want to. It's all right now. You've been having an awful time, haven't you? But we're here to stand by you now. Carr, please get her a glass of water or something."

As I talked, I was full of the wildest curiosity as to what had happened; but Laura was in no condition to be questioned just then. But at last she stopped sobbing, fairly exhausted, and released herself from my arms, with her face flushed and swollen and her mouth still trembling.

Carr, who had been rushing about and glaring at me in agitation and jealousy, brought her something to drink, and she regained some degree of self-control.

"It's like heaven to see you," she said. "I've been through—more than I can tell you. Papa is gone. I'm terribly afraid something has happened to him."

"Gone—and left you alone! Where?" Carr cried.

"He's been gone a long time—more than a week. I don't know where. I don't know what would have become of me if you hadn't come."

"Why didn't you cable sooner? Why didn't you cable me?" Carr demanded.

"I couldn't remember your address."

Carr glanced at me with triumph.

"Besides," she added, "Mr. Williams knows all about Paris, and he's my oldest friend."

"Can you tell us all about it—how you came to Paris, and about your father's disappearance?" Carr asked.

"Not now," I interposed, seeing a look of horror cross her face again. "We'll hear that presently. Just now Laura will send for tea, and we will have a rest and a quiet chat."

We had the tea, and we had the quiet chat, broken by long, abstracted silences

as the mystery thrust its dark face into our consciousness; but Laura became by degrees more like her usual self.

The evening had grown dark when at last I got the whole story from her by gentle questioning.

It was simple enough. After leaving New York with her father, on their way to Old Point, Wainwright had insisted on their leaving the train at Philadelphia. It was then almost midnight; they spent the rest of the night at a hotel, and next morning they went on board a transatlantic steamer, where their passages had been already booked under the names of "Mr. and Miss Henry."

"At first I was astonished and almost frightened," said Laura. "But papa explained that he was obliged to make a short trip to Paris at once, and that there were important business reasons why no one should know that he had gone. He had not even told me in advance, for greater secrecy, and he was sailing by this obscure route so as not to be recognized."

"It was a freight steamer, in fact, and there were only two passengers besides ourselves. All through the voyage papa seemed greatly disturbed about something, though he never mentioned any especial trouble."

"We reached Paris and came to this hotel, still under the name of 'Henry.' Nothing in particular happened for a couple of weeks, and I thought papa seemed a little less worried. Then, one afternoon, eight days ago, he went out alone and did not come back for dinner."

"I waited for him all the evening. He did not come. You can imagine the night I spent," said Laura with a shudder. "Since then, nothing has been heard of him. I don't—"

"Of course you have notified the police," I interrupted.

"Count Courvoise has attended to all that for me. He has set detectives at work, and—"

"Has that fellow been to see you?" exclaimed Carr.

"He came to call on us as soon as we arrived; he was the only person whom papa had told we were here, I believe. He has been very kind to me."

"Do you like him, Laura?" I inquired.

"I hate him!" Laura admitted. "It's a shame, for he has been the only friend I had here. But, somehow, it frightens me to have him come near me."

"Your instinct may be right," I said gravely. "You have other friends now, and you won't need Courvoise. When he calls next, send him to me. I want to see him."

"But what can have become of papa?" Laura cried, recurring to the vital topic.

"I don't know, but we'll find out, never fear," I said. "Do you know if he had any money on him when he went out?"

"He had the letter of credit. It was for several thousand dollars. Probably he had currency as well. He had left scarcely any with me, and I have been in terror that it would be exhausted, and that I'd be turned out of the hotel."

"We can find out whether the letter has been drawn on since he left you," I was saying, when some one tapped at the door.

It was a servant with a card for Laura.

"Count Courvoise is down-stairs, waiting to see me," she said quickly, turning to us.

"Send him away!" exclaimed Carr impatiently.

"Tell *monsieur le comte* that I am not well, that I cannot receive—" Laura was saying to the servant in French, when the mustache and white shirt-front of the count himself appeared in the door. He had followed his card up without waiting.

"I am so sorry to hear it, *mademoiselle*," he said, bowing, and he looked past her into the room. As his eyes fell upon Carr and me, I felt suddenly certain that he had somehow been notified of our arrival, and had hastened here to be on the spot.

"Mr. Carr and Mr. Williams!" he exclaimed. "Another charming surprise. I really might almost fancy myself in New York."

Neither of us returned his bow, and I remarked pointedly: "Hardly. If it were New York, we wouldn't meet you."

"Then I am glad it's Paris." The count smiled blandly.

"We were about to go. Miss Wain-

wright is not well and wishes to be alone," I said, taking up my hat, and Carr and I moved toward the door.

Courvoise was fairly outmaneuvered. "I will take my leave also, then," he murmured. "I shall hope to hear better news to-morrow." Then, with a glance at me: "I will walk a little way with you, if you will permit me."

I was very willing to permit him; in fact, I was going to propose it myself. I dropped a word to Laura under my breath, and we three went down-stairs.

Once on the soft glitter and the gay hum of the boulevard, the count stepped to the curb, glanced up the street, and seemed to signal. I looked too, but saw nothing more than a closed cab, that crawled after us as we began to walk slowly along the sidewalk.

I was planning what to say, when the count took the wind out of my sails.

"Now, Williams," he said crisply. "Tell me—what have you done with the American?"

"With Wainwright?" I gasped. "Great Heavens! What have you done with him yourself? For I'm morally certain that you're at the bottom of all this."

"I declare on my word that I know absolutely nothing of what has become of him," protested Courvoise. "I've had men searching for him for a week. *Nom de Dieu!* it's more important to me than to any one else that he should be found."

"Why?" Carr demanded.

"Well, as his future son-in-law—"

"You liar!" Carr burst out.

Fil-de-Fer started, flushed, and glanced over his shoulder quickly.

"That's not a word to use among gentlemen," he observed.

"No, but it's a good word to use to you!" Carr boiled.

"Hold on. Let's not quarrel!" I interposed. "We won't discuss the marriage question. The important thing, first, is to find what has become of Mr. Wainwright."

"I tell you I know nothing about it," the count repeated, and turned off to go down a little street that stretched away into dim down-hill regions to the left.

"No, keep to the boulevard," I said, with a sudden premonition.

"We would be quieter this way," Courvoise urged.

"But perhaps not so peaceful," I said, taking him firmly by the arm and turning him back.

The crawling cab had come up close behind us, and as I glanced at it I saw at least three faces peering through the glass. Its interior must have been packed with men.

The faces disappeared instantly, but a cold thrill shot down my backbone. Now I was certain that Fil-de-Fer had been forewarned of our coming to the Grand Hôtel.

"I think, in fact, that Mr. Carr and I will leave you here," I went on. "You mustn't follow us. And listen, Count Courvoise!" I said imperatively. "You must in future make no attempt to see Miss Wainwright. We have come all the way from New York to protect her, and we'll do it."

We left him planted on the sidewalk, looking cold steel at us both. No doubt he would have liked to call up his cargeload of ruffians, but the crowded boulevard was not the place. And, looking warily over my shoulder, I presently saw him get into the cab and drive off.

I instantly stopped another cab that happened to be passing.

"Go back to the hotel," I said to Carr. "I'll be along in an hour. I must find out where he's going." And to the driver: "Double fare, if you don't lose sight of that cab."

CHAPTER IX.

THE LATIN QUARTER.

It is not so easy to follow a cab through crowded streets, however, and especially in the evening. We kept it in sight down to the blaze of the Place de Opéra, up the Rue Scribe, and then straight along the Rue Lafayette north-eastward.

It was clear to me where Fil-de-Fer and his gang were going. They were heading for Montmartre and the northern *barrière*, the heights of the city by the fortifications where criminal Paris has its headquarters.

We kept them in sight to the Boulevard Clichy, the Tenderloin of Paris,

lying like a terrace on the side of the steep Montmartre slope. Near the Château Rouge we became involved in a jam of cabs and automobiles, and when we had got clear the count's cab was out of sight.

I was angry and disappointed, but it was not the fault of my driver. We roamed about at random for a time; and then, realizing that there was no use in going farther, I ordered him to take us back to the Grand Hôtel. At any rate, I had learned the region that the enemy frequented.

Another surprise met me as I entered the hotel. Just inside the reading-room, keeping a sharp, unobtrusive eye on every one who entered, sat a man I knew well.

It was a detective from my old office, the Manhattan Bureau, and it flashed upon me that he was no doubt employed in the search for Wainwright.

I thought he passed an imperceptible wink to me as he saw me; but he made no open recognition, and I did not speak, but went straight up-stairs to Laura's room.

Carr was there, and they were conversing so eagerly that they hardly heard my knock. Laura seemed wonderfully brighter. Carr had succeeded in cheering her up, I thought, with perhaps a little ungenerous jealousy. But it was not a moment for sentiment.

"The first thing is to get right out of this hotel," I said, "and into some quiet spot, the more obscure the better, where no one will think of looking for us. *Monsieur le comte* means mischief."

And I told briefly what had happened, for Carr had not seen the menace of the crowded cab.

"It can't be the count who has taken papa away!" cried Laura. "I never dreamed of such a thing—it can't be."

There was silence.

"I'm afraid it's quite possible," I said. "Though, to be sure, I don't see how he could profit in any way by getting your father out of sight. A few days, however, ought to make it clear. One thing I'm certain of—that Harry Wainwright is alive and well, and in Paris; though why he's lying low in this way, I can't imagine."

I was rewarded by Laura's grateful

look, but I spoke with more confidence, than I really felt.

In my heart I believed either that Fil-de-Fer had kidnaped the millionaire and was keeping him imprisoned for reasons of his own, or else that Wainwright's mind had somehow become unhinged, and he had wandered off into some perhaps fatal misadventure.

But I said nothing of this. We spent the rest of the evening in packing. I paid the bills, and next morning at six o'clock—the best hour for escaping possible spying—we drove away from the hotel with one of Laura's trunks on the top of our cab.

The rest of her baggage I ordered sent to a storage warehouse for the present, and Carr's trunk and mine were still at the railway station.

We crossed the river to the Latin Quarter, and we had to drive about for an hour or two before it was late enough to look for lodgings. Finally we found a sufficiently quiet, clean, and obscure refuge in a students' hotel—the Hôtel d'Ostende, on the Rue Bonaparte, just below the Luxembourg Gardens.

The hotel, which would have been called a "furnished-room house" in New York, contained no more than a dozen lodgers, and was managed by a withered but spry old lady of nearly seventy, with the assistance of her huge, black-bearded son as *valet de chambre*.

All day long this indefatigable Mme. Lagache swept, mopped, scrubbed, and dusted, followed obediently by her big son, who had spent two years in a cavalry regiment in Tunis, and now emptied slops and made beds with a simple naturalness that dignified his office.

Laura took to them at once, and I hoped that this was a spot where we could remain concealed and quiet as long as we chose.

Prices have risen in the Latin Quarter, and the place has lost the desperately spectacular Bohemia that probably it never had, except in books. The more impecunious students and artists have moved to Montmartre, and there is almost village quiet on the little, crooked, clean streets of the Left Bank.

"We installed Laura in a room on the top floor, and Carr and I took the apartment directly beneath her. A heavy tip

to the *concierge* impressed upon her that no one was to go up to see Mlle. Henry without first sending up his name. Laura was to have her meals brought in from a restaurant across the street; in fact, she was to live almost as a prisoner, till we obtained further light on the dangers that might be threatening us. For the present I was determined to take no chances.

We were no sooner settled than I hurried across the river again to the banking house on which Wainwright's letter of credit had been drawn. Disappointment was the result, for I learned that the letter had not yet been presented at all.

Clearly Wainwright must have brought a sufficient sum in cash from America to last him for some time, but by now it would surely have been exhausted. He would almost certainly have drawn on his credit, if he were alive and at liberty.

Yet, if he were alive and at liberty, what possible reason could he have for thus concealing himself?

I went back to the Latin Quarter, puzzling over this problem, trying somehow to connect it with Courvoise and not quite succeeding. Then, in the very doorway of the Hôtel d'Ostende, I espied Miller, the American detective whom I had seen at the Grand Hôtel. The sight gave me a sudden, queer uneasiness.

I walked straight up to him this time.

"Business or pleasure, Miller?" I demanded.

"Well, either," he answered, with a shrewd, humorous side-glance. "I wanted to see you, Williams. Thought you might perhaps call at the office to see the boys again."

"Perhaps I may. But what did you want to see me for?"

"Look here. You're in the profession, or used to be. Can I talk to you on the square?"

I hesitated, and my conscience pricked me.

"Yes," I said with a mental reservation.

"I'm looking for Wainwright, the New York insurance man. You know him, don't you?"

"I understood that he'd disappeared in America. I heard of it before I sailed," I remarked.

"Now, you're not talking on the level,

Williams," Miller reproached me. "You needn't try to bluff. Wainwright was spotted here two weeks ago. He was at the Grand Hôtel, with his daughter, under an assumed name. Yesterday you and your friend came here with Miss Wainwright, and I've every reason to suppose that you either have him here, too, or that you know where he is."

I was astonished at so much accurate information.

"You fellows have grown clever since I left," I remarked. "But I assure you that I haven't the slightest idea where the man is. I believe he's been murdered. Why should I want to hide him, or why should his daughter want to—or, for that matter, why should he want to hide himself?"

"Well, I don't know. There's possibly a reason," said Miller. "You know—"

"But aren't you working on his daughter's behalf? Aren't you trying to find him?" I demanded.

"Why, I'm trying to serve a subpoena on him, you know," Miller explained. "Summons to testify before the insurance committee in New York on the business of his company. That's what I thought he might be trying to dodge."

"By Jove!" I exclaimed, and a whole new avenue of possibilities opened suddenly before me.

I had totally forgotten the insurance investigation.

"All the same, I don't know anything about him," I said. "You can go back and tell the chief that from me."

"I'll tell him, all right, but I don't think he'll be satisfied," returned Miller with a grin as he walked off.

But I stood on the sidewalk for a long time, gazing across at the green tree-tops of the Luxembourg and thinking hard, before I went up-stairs at last to meet Laura.

CHAPTER X.

MONTMARTRE AFTER MIDNIGHT.

LAURA refused to believe that her father could be hiding for any business reasons, and Carr ridiculed the idea. But I was not convinced. Certainly there was no question of Wainwright's

personal integrity, yet I thought that possibly there might be secrets in the administration of the Madison Life which he would rather not have made public. But I should have credited him with more common sense than to take this silly and useless method of concealment.

However, if he were really lying low, I felt certain that he would be in one of the American or English pensions that swarm in the west end of Paris near the Bois de Boulogne. For Wainwright spoke little or no French, and, in spite of a dozen visits, knew practically nothing of the city.

There was a chance, I thought; and I persuaded Carr to spend a couple of days with me in investigating it. I found that he knew Paris like a book—or part of it, at least. He had acquired the knowledge expensively in his gilded days, when he had also learned to speak French as well as I did.

At one of the tourist agencies we procured a list of English-speaking boarding-houses, and proceeded to visit them one by one. There was an incredible number of them; our two days extended to nearly a week, but when we had finished with them we had had our labor for our pains, and the daily disappointment had worn poor Laura almost into nervous prostration.

My suspicions turned again toward Courvoise as the holder of the secret. We had seen and heard nothing of him since leaving the Grand Hôtel, and now I regretted more than ever that I had failed that day to track him down to the place he had come from.

In the *Bottin*—the city directory—his address was given as the Cercle de Russie, a club which I knew to be like many of the Paris clubs, simply a gambling association. It was impossible that he lived there; the great family mansion, the old Hôtel Courvoise in the Impasse St. Francis, had been sold two generations ago, and just where the last diminished head of the family was laid I did not know.

I had a shrewd suspicion, however, and next evening I turned to the heights of Montmartre, where impecunious, artistic, criminal, and adventurous Paris seethes together in the narrow, up-and-down streets and steps of the old suburb.

It was nearly midnight when I left my cab and walked along the Boulevard Clichy, for I knew that Courvoise and his associates were night-birds and there would be no use in going earlier into their haunts.

The Tenderloin of Paris had not changed much in five years, I thought as I strolled warily along the showy boulevard. On every side flared the more or less sensational resorts designed to give the tourist a glimpse of the real Parisian wickedness that he expects.

The *Moulin Rouge* revolved its red arms slowly above the sidewalk; the *Rat Mort*, the *Grande Truanderie*, the Cafés of Death, Heaven, and Hell advertised their perfumery outrageousness to the street, crowded with revelers, tourists, overdressed women, and quiet, thin-faced men with savage, restless eyes. These last I knew and kept clear of; they were the wolves of the street, the Paris Apaches, perhaps members of Fil-de-Fer's gang.

I prowled about the district in a desultory way that night, from the fortifications almost to the Buttes, peeping into cafés, scrutinizing street groups, hoping that I might pick up something useful by a lucky chance. I did not find anything of the sort, but the night brought me a strange meeting, which was to bear fruit later.

I was climbing the long flight of steps that leads to the plateau of the Sacré Cœur, and was half-way up when I noticed a man coming down from the top. He stopped a couple of steps above me.

"Will *monsieur* tell me the time?" he requested.

I examined him swiftly, noted the cheap swagger of his bearing, and also that one hand was clenched in his pocket.

"Time to be off," I replied, showing just the shining muzzle of my six-shooter.

"*Parfaitement, monsieur*," laughed the *rodeur*, with easy assurance, and stood aside to let me pass. I went wide, keeping my eye on him, and caught a better glimpse of his face.

"Rochet!" I cried.

The fellow's face quickened, he stared, hesitated, and almost gasped.

"M. Williams!" he ejaculated. "Ah, *'cré nom! Quelle chance!* And I'd have had my knife into you—"

"I dare say," I said. "But what have you been doing? How do you come to be an Apache?"

Six or eight years before, Emile Rochet had been a most useful assistant to me in my work in Paris. He was a youngster of fourteen then, sharp with the prenatal keenness of the streets where he had been born and bred.

I knew enough about him to have him clapped into prison several times over, and this fact perhaps strengthened his loyalty; but he liked me, I believe, and professed to be inconsolable when I sailed for America.

I had made some provision for him, to keep him out of the gutter, and now here he was, with a knife in his pocket, his face already seared and scorched with alcohol and crime, prowling over midnight Montmartre in search of prey. But he seemed genuinely affected at the meeting.

"You should have stayed, *monsieur*," he said. "After you went, they wouldn't use me at the American detective office. Then I had a little difficulty with the police, and so now"—he shrugged his shoulders with a certain pride—"now I steal, I rob."

"Do you kill, too?"

"*Monsieur* doesn't think me afraid of a little red."

"I think you're likely to claim relationship with Sister Guillotine," I said. "Would you like to work for me again, at the old terms? I think I can use you."

"I'd ask nothing better," he said eagerly.

"Good. To begin with, do you know the Count Courvoise?"

"*Connais pas*." He shook his head. "The aristocracy are not intimate with me."

"Fil-de-Fer," I corrected.

The Apache brightened up.

"Fil-de-Fer! Do I know him? I should think so! That is, I know him by sight. He's an aristocrat, sure enough, a lord of Montmartre, prince of the Apaches. He's not afraid of the police, and he has a dozen of the worst ruffians in Paris at the crook of his finger."

"You're not one of them?" I interrupted his enthusiasm.

"No, *monsieur*. I am not sufficiently advanced," he confessed.

"Well, this is very interesting," I said. "Where does Fil-de-Fer and his gang have their headquarters?"

"I don't know. But I can find out."

"Good. Find out, then, and meet me to-morrow night at this same spot. Now, go, and remember that it's not safe to play any tricks with me. You've become so good an Apache that I don't trust you."

The fellow went down the steps and turned into the black mouth of the Rue Gabrielle without looking back. After some reflection, I turned back to the Boulevard. My new ally, born and bred in the depths of Paris, would find out what I wanted, and there was no use at present in exposing my life further.

I did not say much to Laura or to Carr about my adventures. The result was too uncertain, and I did not want to raise their hopes. I merely said that I was exploring Montmartre in the hope of finding a clue, and that I thought I was on the trail.

I was disappointed, for next evening Rochet failed to appear. I waited, hanging about the stairs for nearly an hour, and finally gave him up and went back to explorations of my own. Again Rochet failed me on the following night, and I planned grimly to get even with the traitor as I prowled about the slums like a bird of prey.

I saw terrible things in those two nights, and ran terrible risks, though I was dressed with careful shabbiness of effect and carried a revolver in my coat-pocket and a heavy loaded cane in my hand. I came home once to find my boots soaked with blood, from a dark puddle that I had stepped into unsuspectingly.

Once a man in evening clothes reeled out of a dark alley and tumbled at my feet, with the life pouring out from a dozen knife-cuts. I saw men—and women, too—held up, robbed, and beaten in dark squares by gangs of hoodlums, and dared not interfere, and, which was pleasanter, I saw knives and pistols drawn in street feuds, where the wolves of the street took sides and turned against one another.

For this is the quarter of the murderers, the *rodeurs*, the Apaches, who kill as often as not for the sheer pleasure

of killing, like the weasel. They are a development of the last thirty years, and it is chiefly absinthe that is responsible for their criminal insanity, more terrible than anything known in saner America.

By day and in the early evening these streets, clean as even a Paris slum is always clean, wear a pleasantly quiet and suburban air. But the wild beasts awake with midnight; shadowy, skulking forms haunt the darker streets; the dance-halls of the *barrière* fill, and the *cabarets* and drinking-houses, where a stranger would risk his life by showing a nickel watch.

The police seem quite unable to handle the situation, and will also be so until they carry revolvers instead of their useless short swords.

I ran risks, but I came through them safely, thanks to a perfect knowledge of French slang, a little audacity, and a great deal of caution. But I saw no more of Emile Rochet until the third evening.

I was walking slowly along the Boulevard Clichy, near the Place Blanche, when a man jostled sharply against me in the throng. As I turned angrily to look at him I saw that it was my unreliable assistant, and he gave me a glance that checked the words on my lips.

"Look out for yourself!" he muttered. "Two of Fil-de-Fer's gang are following you."

And he was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

A MEETING IN HADES.

I WALKED on a little way, stopped to look in a shop window, and glanced cautiously back. I could not at once make out any one who looked as if he might be shadowing me in the crowd of boulevardiers that filled the sidewalk, but presently a couple of men came in sight—sharp-featured, pale, shifty-looking, like true sons of the gaslight, and passed me without a glance.

Whether of Fil-de-Fer's gang or not, they were of the true Apache type. But they appeared to be following, not me, but some one else.

I walked slowly after them. A few yards farther and I caught sight of a man

standing at the edge of the sidewalk. He was looking the other way, but there was something about his back that I seemed to recognize.

I started toward him, with a suddenly beating heart, forgetting the "shadowers." It was an old man, with a shock of white hair, and as he began to walk away he seemed to move unsteadily, as if either intoxicated or utterly exhausted. Then he looked suddenly over his shoulder, and I almost shouted his name.

For it was Wainwright—Wainwright himself, on the streets of the Paris Tendon.

The face that he had turned toward me was haggard and hunted, and as pitiable as any human face I ever saw.

I started to push toward him, and found the two Apaches at my elbow. They were looking at me now, with both surprise and interest, and I was struck all at once with the certainty that I had seen at least one of their faces before—through the glass window of a closed cab.

The recognition filled my mind for an instant, and when I glanced ahead again the figure of Wainwright had disappeared.

I ran after him, elbowing my way through the crowd, but I could not find him. We were in front of the Café de l'Enfer, where a rather tame representation of future punishment is given to shock the sensation-seeking tourist; but I could not think that he had entered the place.

I saw the pair of Apaches go in, however; and, after another anxious glance up and down the street, I took the chance of following them.

It was a long, low, narrow hall, dimly lighted, with glass-topped tables illumined by a fiery glow from beneath. Pasteboard serpents decorated the ceiling; a man in a dress-suit banged a piano in a crimson caldron.

Satan himself, in the conventional scarlet and cock's feather, waved me to a seat, and an attendant imp hovered round for my order.

Instead of sitting down I looked round, and drew a sigh of relief to see that I had been right. For there sat the man I was looking for, his elbows on the lurid table and his head in his hands, in an attitude of total prostration.

He paid no attention to the glass of beer beside him. The two roughs had sat down on the opposite side of the same table, but he failed to notice them.

The Apaches transferred their attention to me, as I sat down at the nearest possible table, and there was suspicion, hostility, if not menace, in their faces. I was sure that they had recognized me, and were going to stand between me and their victim—if he were their victim.

"Bring me a bock," I said impatiently to the satanic waiter who hovered at my shoulder.

"One pot of molten brimstone of the hottest!" he sang out to the bar, and Mephistopheles emitted a rattling laugh.

It was Wainwright. There was no doubt of it, and I wondered what terrible history his presence implied. Had Courvoise been keeping him prisoner—had he escaped, and was about to be recaptured—or had these thugs simply marked him as a likely object of robbery?

I could not guess, but evil was preparing for him, and I rejoiced that I had come up before the crisis.

I tried to catch his eye, but he would not look up. I was afraid to go to him directly. The Apaches were regarding me more and more threateningly, and I saw that I had committed a fatal error in making myself so conspicuous. I could do nothing unless I could get out of their watchfulness, and I got up, intending to go out and wait for Wainwright on the sidewalk.

But before I reached the door one of the men rose to follow me. And, at this open declaration of war, I turned back and sat down again.

A nervous five minutes passed. The piano clanged, the demons laughed and shrieked, *papier-mâché* snakes were swung down from the ceiling, while the Apaches watched me without moving, and I watched Wainwright, who kept his head in his hands. I fancied that he had gone to sleep.

"*A la chaudière!*" shouted Satan, and the customers arose and filed obediently toward the "hot room." But Wainwright kept his seat, and the two men stayed with him.

I followed the crowd gladly, however, seeing a chance of slipping quietly out.

The *chaudière* was an inner chamber,

decorated to resemble a grotto, and I was disappointed to find that it had no street door. On a small stage at the farther end a crimson-clad devil was giving an exhibition of contortions, and afterward a presumably wicked individual was shown burning at the stake. After the flames had flared up so as to conceal his body completely, they gradually sank, and a skeleton was seen hanging in the chains.

I had seen the same thing before, on the New York vaudeville stage, and when volunteers were called for to be burned alive I accepted with alacrity.

They clasped the chain round my waist, and the puffs of steam, illuminated by rays from a lantern, began to rise round my legs. When these mock flames had enshrouded me safely an arm deftly unhooked the chain, and I was pulled aside and behind a curtain.

"I have saved you from your well-merited punishment," said the demon sepulchraly. "It is worth—"

"A franc," I replied. "And a half louis, if you get me out of here without passing through the café."

The devil winked and nodded with a very human interest, hustled me back through a storeroom, a passage, and into a narrow courtyard. Here he opened a door, and I was in the blaze of the street.

I walked round to the entrance and peeped cautiously into the café. The three men were gone.

Cursing my clumsiness, I rushed up and down the street. There was no sign of them. I thought they might have gone down one of the narrow cross streets, and I peered round the first corner. The little street was dim and deserted.

I wheeled round, wild with anxiety and rage, and dashed back to the other corner, that of the Rue Pierre Haret. And there, twenty yards away, I saw three figures moving slowly down the street, close together, while a fourth form followed a little way behind. Then, all at once, they all seemed to coalesce into one struggling mass.

I rushed down toward them, and a cab passed me, driving swiftly to the spot. As I came up I landed such a blow with my loaded stick on the head of one of the men that he dropped as if he had been struck dead.

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Suddenly released, Wainwright staggered back against the wall. His hat had fallen off, and his disordered hair shone white. But, to my amazement, I saw that the second Apache was wrestling furiously with a young fellow in the velveteen coat and baggy trousers of a Bohemian artist.

Before I could take it all in the artist had freed himself, dashing his man down with a crash on the pavement, and he instantly wheeled and grasped me by the throat with a strangling grip.

"Ah-h-h!" I gurgled, speechless as much from astonishment as from the choking, for it was Penfield Carr's face under the big, soft hat—Carr, whom I had supposed safe at home in the Hôtel d'Ostende.

"Look out—drop!" Carr exclaimed, letting me go, and I ducked without knowing why.

A knife swished over my shoulder harmlessly, and a man bumped heavily into my back. Carr's fist shot out over my head—there was a thud, and a fall. It was the cab driver, and I knew him when I turned.

It was Jules, who had clashed with me in New York.

For the moment he was knocked out.

"Come along, Mr. Wainwright. Can you run? Quick!" Carr exclaimed. "Williams, take his other arm."

But poor Wainwright only moaned as we dragged him between us up to the Boulevard. In another half minute we had him in a cab, and were driving fast toward the Latin Quarter.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BLACK BOOK.

"WHERE on earth have you been, Wainwright? What has happened?" I exclaimed as soon as we were well off.

The millionaire, lying back in one corner, murmured something indistinguishable, but did not even open his eyes.

"He's thoroughly done up by—whatever he's been through. But how did you get on his track?" I said to Carr. "In disguise, too, by Jove!" I looked over his picturesque get-up with a laugh, for I felt gay enough at the idea that our troubles were over.

"I've been on a still-hunt of my own for the last couple of nights," Carr replied. "I put on this rig, because an artist can go anywhere and never gets held up. But it was sheer, blind good luck that made me sight him coming out of that joint with the two toughs."

"They were Count Courvois's men. He's been at the bottom of it all."

"I thought so. We'll hear it all as soon as he's rested enough to talk."

But Wainwright remained in his semistupor throughout the ride, and we had almost to carry him up the dark stairs to our room, where we got him into bed. I went out at once to the café opposite and brought up a bowl of coffee, while Carr hastened up-stairs to tell Laura.

I returned first. Wainwright seemed a little more awake, and I got him to take the coffee, which, after the first sip, he drank eagerly. He looked up at me questioningly.

"That's better. It's really you, Williams? I thought I must be dreaming. Where is—"

At this moment Laura burst in, in dressing-gown and slippers—pale, breathless—and flung herself on her knees by the bed.

"Oh, papa—papa! It's you! I thought I'd never see you again. You're all right? You're not hurt? What has been the matter? Oh, I thought I should have died!"

She was stroking her father's head, kissing his hand, patting him over to make sure that he was safe and sound, and then she burst into crying and buried her head in the pillow.

"Laura, daughter!" said Wainwright brokenly. "Don't blame me for leaving you. I couldn't help it. Forgive me—I—"

"I know—I know! Don't talk of it," said Laura. "It doesn't matter now—since I have you back. And now we can all go away from this terrible city, can't we? Back home—back to America—to New York."

"Uncle Bob, you'll see about getting our tickets for the first steamer, won't you? The very first," she repeated, half smiling and still half weeping.

"You bet I will," I responded with all my heart, but Wainwright raised a protesting hand.

"Wait," he murmured, and paused, as if from weakness.

"I must speak to you, Williams—alone—on something private."

Laura looked astonished and hurt, Carr merely surprised at being thus turned out of the room; but they went at once.

"We can't leave Paris, Williams. Don't buy any steamer tickets. Laura and I have to stay, until—"

"Yes, until—" I repeated. "Now, what's all this mystery?"

His face had begun to flush with the strong liquor, and his voice grew firmer.

"Where am I?" he questioned.

"In the Hôtel d'Ostende, in the Latin Quarter."

"Does Count Courvois know that Laura is here?"

"I hope not. What has Courvois to do with all this?"

Wainwright hesitated long, with his eyes on my face.

"The count has documents—business documents—of the Madison Life," he said at last. "They're so important that I daren't appear before the investigating committee without them."

"I suspected something of the sort. How did he get them?"

"It was when I was ill in New York last winter with pneumonia. I was irrational part of the time; but I had lucid intervals when I knew that I was liable to die, and there were certain things that I wanted to have destroyed."

"They were in the little safe, you know, that's built into the wall of my bedroom. They had been there ten years. There were reasons why I couldn't ask even Laura to do it for me. If you had only been there—but there wasn't time to send for you."

He stopped, breathing heavily, and a dark shadow that I was afraid to define began to rise in my mind.

"The count had been with me a great deal," he went on at last. "He seemed to be a gentleman; and he was a foreigner and would be away in a few months, and he knew nothing of American business affairs, and—finally, one day, I gave him the combination of the lock and asked him to burn what was in the safe."

"Of course we were alone in the

room. I was too weak to lift my head; but when it was all over Courvoise lifted me up, and I saw the grate full of charred paper. I thought it was all right. It took an immense weight from my mind, and I began to get better at once.

"I thought it was all right, as I say, till that evening—you remember—at the Hôtel Richelieu. Then I learned that Courvoise had burned only part of the things. The most important, the ledger, he had smuggled out. He had it. He showed it to me."

He stopped again, and I looked at him with a heavy heart. The shadow of doubt that had risen in my mind was become almost a certainty.

"Well, it was a question of how much he wanted for it, I suppose," I said. "What did you offer him?"

"Not exactly that. You see—he wanted to marry Laura. He insisted that I should use my influence—"

"And you refused, I hope!" I interrupted sharply.

Wainwright was silent.

"Come, now," I said, sitting down beside him. "You haven't told me all. You can trust me, I hope. Take it that I'm a detective acting for you, as I am. I can't do anything unless you're perfectly frank. What is the nature of the documents—the ledger—that Courvoise stole?"

He was too weak to deny or to lie; he only looked at me with helpless, pitiable appeal.

"Swear that you will never speak of it!" he implored.

I stood up and turned away.

"No, don't go, Williams!" he cried. "Of course I can trust you. Only, for Heaven's sake, remember what it means to me—my business honor and all! And it was so long ago!"

The whole story came out—stumblingly, incoherently, and squalid and tragic enough—as I had foreseen.

It was common enough, indeed—the story of funds taken from the immense surplus of the Madison Life and misused, as his autocratic control of the company enabled him to do; of hundreds of thousands transferred to the tottering Ocean Trust Company, which was at one time another of his enterprises; of a jug-

gling with millions of assets from the account of one concern to another till at last, almost without knowing how, he found them deposited to his own—it was an old story, simple enough in spite of its complexity, but it was an appalling one to hear from Henry Wainwright, president of that model institution, the Madison Life.

The only redeeming feature was that, as it appeared, he had always kept the idea of restitution in his mind. For this purpose, as I gathered, all the details of his illegitimate transactions had been entered with businesslike accuracy in the ledger which he had mentioned, and he had kept this terrific and damning record for ten years in the safe that he had had specially built for it beside his bed.

"I had not felt especially uneasy about it," he went on with an effort, "until you told me of the count's record. Then, that night while you waited for me at the hotel! It made an old man of me. I threatened, entreated, promised—I don't know what I said.

"When I heard that the man had sailed for France again, I didn't know what to think. But he had scarcely more than got there than he cabled me to come over at once, and to bring Laura with me.

"I was afraid to refuse. I sailed under a false name. I suppose Laura has told you. I did all I could, Williams, believe me! But what could I do?"

"You might have done a good deal," I said. "But now you can just let me alone, and I'll settle the fellow."

"For Heaven's sake, be careful, Williams," he cried in terror. "You can't understand what it means to me! To have such a thing come out, after all these years, with the reputation I have."

"I'm thinking rather of what the alternative means to Laura," I told him. "Why did you leave her?"

"I heard, by accident, that there was a subpoena out for me to testify before the committee. I daren't face it. I knew that Courvoise would put in his testimony, too, when our company's case came up.

"The only thing to do was to delay things by dodging the subpoena. So I disappeared, and I couldn't explain to Laura or tell her where I was going.

"I went to a little hotel in the north-east part of the city. I forgot that I had only a little money with me; and when I found it out, I was afraid to draw on my letter of credit, lest I should be recognized and followed.

"I stayed at the little hotel as long as I could, till my money ran out. My bill was due this morning, and I couldn't speak enough French to make explanations.

"I went out early this morning and walked about. I had a letter of credit for ten thousand dollars in my pocket, but only a couple of francs to keep me from starving.

"If I had known where the count lived, I would have gone to him, I believe. But I didn't; and I walked and walked all day and all evening. I thought of going back to the Grand Hôtel, but I was afraid.

"Finally, late at night, I remember going into a café to rest, and I think I went to sleep. I seem to recollect seeing your face. I thought, then, that I was dreaming, for I was pretty far gone. Then I went out, somehow; two men were helping me along, and I was too exhausted to care what became of me. Then there was a row, and then I was in a cab—it's all hazy."

I looked at my old friend's haggard and tortured face, and pity swamped all my other emotions.

"You've been a greater fool than I could have believed possible," I said; "and you've been a coward; but you've suffered for it. Heaven knows that I don't pretend to judge you, so long as you don't try to sacrifice your daughter."

"What shall I do, then?" he asked faintly.

"Anything but that. Leave it all to me—and Carr. I know how to deal with fellows like the count. We'll get your ledger back all right. You'd better describe it accurately to me."

"It's a black book," he said, his voice growing feebler. "A common, black-bound ledger, about six by ten inches, not very thick. It was locked; but that fellow filed the hasp to open it. It's half full of complicated accounts. You can easily recognize it by the broken lock."

"I'll get it," I said confidently. "But

look here, Wainwright! You must give me your word that you'll refund all that money at once. What's the total amount?"

"Not over eight hundred thousand. I'd have done it before, only it isn't easy to produce nearly a million without showing where it came from—and why. But I'll do it the first thing when I get back to New York, if you can only get me out of this trouble."

"Another thing. You mustn't let Carr or Laura suspect a word of this," I added. "Tell them that Courvoisier has stolen documents which must be recovered before the investigation comes off. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Wainwright almost inaudibly.

He gave me one look, and then his eyes closed.

I thought for a moment that he was dying, and sprang up.

But his breath came and went regularly. He was simply in a deep stupor of exhaustion, and I left him to the medicine of sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOVE AND LIKING.

I WENT softly out, and looked up Carr and Laura, to whom I repeated my own version of Wainwright's confession and troubles.

"Oh, dear!" said Laura, dismayed. "I thought we could go home. I thought the trouble was all over; but it seems that it's only begun."

"Not a bit of it. We'll get those business papers back, all right, in no time," cried Carr cheerfully. "Won't we, Williams?"

"Of course," I said confidently. But I did not speak of the price that Courvoisier demanded for them.

It was then nearly four o'clock in the morning, and with some difficulty I persuaded Laura to go to bed again. I myself was ready to drop with fatigue, and Carr was not much better. We went down-stairs, found Wainwright still asleep, and both flung ourselves on the other bed, where I, at least, lapsed into immediate unconsciousness.

Carr awoke me about nine o'clock,

and I opened my eyes from uneasy dreams to find the sun pouring into the room and Wainwright still sleeping soundly. We went out quietly, left word with our *concierge* to send up Laura's breakfast, and crossed the street to the café where we took our own meals.

Here, sitting over our coffee and *petits pains* at a table on the sunny sidewalk, I told Carr what the count demanded in return for the precious black book.

"The fellow is actually trying to blackmail Wainwright into letting him marry Laura?" exclaimed Carr in huge indignation. "Well, luckily Laura will have something to say about it. He can't force her. Surely he won't try."

"I don't know. Wainwright has gone to pieces. He's utterly broken up. He's desperate; and if he should be served with papers to testify at the investigation, and knew that Fil-de-Fer was going to produce that record—hold it out, I mean—"

"But is an American subpoena good in France?" Carr suggested.

"I don't know. I never thought of that!" I declared, struck by this consideration. "But it doesn't matter whether it's legally good or not," I added, after thinking for a few seconds. "If the papers are served, Wainwright will be morally bound to appear, or his absence would be the worst possible testimony against him."

"Yes, I suppose so. But what's in that stolen ledger, anyhow?"

"Wainwright didn't say exactly. But it's so important that he daren't appear without it."

"Well, we've got to get the blamed thing away from your Apache count. And we'll have to keep Wainwright out of sight, or they'll start to investigate him before he's ready. But, so far as Laura is concerned—don't worry."

"Why not?"

"Well, of course, if it came to the point, if I had to do it to stop the marriage, I wouldn't hesitate to shoot that fellow. Besides—"

"Yes—besides," I said with an agitation that I tried to conceal. "How is your own affair going, Carr? What are your chances?"

"Of course I haven't worried her

with my nonsense while we've been here. She's had troubles enough. But she knows, I think—she must have seen—how I feel about it. And, well, sometimes I'm optimistic and sometimes not. But you can be certain that I'm not going to let anybody else take her away from me, not without a fight."

He did not know that it was a declaration of war against me too, and I was sorry for the forced rivalry as I looked at him, brimming with friendliness, youth, hope, and animation.

I liked Penfield Carr too much to want to beat him, but I did want to beat him. Was it a hopeless endeavor? I caught sight of my face in the mirror of the café-door, and I saw that I looked all of my forty-odd years.

As I sat there, warmed through and through by the delicious morning sun, with the faint languor of fatigue still lingering, I grew strangely hopeful. Hope is in the air of Paris.

I listened vaguely to Carr's chatting and smoked a good deal as I gazed across at the massed green of the Luxembourg Gardens, shining through the iron grille.

Distinguished-looking Parisians, dainty women, children, nurse-maids, hurried, loitered, romped on the sidewalk, like people who knew the enjoyment of life. A vender of cream-cheese wandered down the street with her musical cry: "*Crème! A la cre-eme!*" A push-cart full of strawberries made a vivid spot of crimson up the Rue Vaugirard, and the warm sun and the cheerfulness of Paris gave me hope and daring and confidence of success.

"It's only a question of money, after all," I found that Carr was saying.

"Money! What do you mean?" I exclaimed.

"To buy Courvoise off. We'll offer him a hundred thousand, or a quarter of a million. Wainwright will stand to the bargain. Do you know where the count lives?"

"No, but I think I can find out."

And I told Carr of my Apache assistant, Rochet, in whom I felt more confidence since he had passed me the warning on the boulevard.

"We must find him," said Carr. "Meanwhile, we must get Wainwright

into a room of his own and keep him dark."

"Yes, and we'd better go back and see if he's awake," I remarked, throwing away my last cigarette. "We've left him alone long enough."

When we went back, we found Wainwright not only awake, but out of bed and dressed. He seemed not much the worse for his adventures, beyond being still weak and shaky; but I saw again, with a shock, how changed he was from the man he had been three months before.

He was old and broken, and his whole manner was full of nervousness and irresolution that marked the moral break-up that had come with the physical—that was, in fact, the cause of the physical. The thing he had kept buried for so many years had burst out at last with shattering effect.

Carr went down-stairs to order breakfast for him, and to make arrangements for hiring another room, while I went up to see Laura. She had been sitting with her father before he was up, and I found her silently crying over him, alone in her room.

She seemed glad to bring her troubles to me, as she had done many times before.

"Poor papa—I don't know what can be the matter with him," she said. "He seems twenty years older, and so worn and broken! Isn't it incredible that Count Courvoise should have turned out to be that kind of man—a thief and a blackmailer? But I don't see why papa doesn't have him arrested, or else ignore him, or, if the papers are really so very important, why doesn't he pay what the man wants and have the trouble over?"

"The count wants a very high price," I remarked. "But the papers he holds are really very important, and we're going to try to come to terms with him. Carr and I are going into the lion's den to-night, if we can find it. We'll beat him down, if possible; but, anyhow, we're going to have that black ledger—by fraud or force, dead or alive!"

"Force? Do you mean that there may be danger?" she asked anxiously.

"It's possible—if Fil-de-Fer is obstinate."

"And Mr. Carr—"

"Are you afraid Carr'll be hurt?" I interrupted rather roughly.

She was silent, and a slow flush spread over her face as she gazed down at the damp handkerchief in her hand. Then she raised her eyes, and they were full of a wonderful softness that I had never seen in them.

It made my heart palpitate suddenly—but was the look for me or for Carr?

"That isn't kind," she said. "Mr. Carr is a very old friend, and you know how terrible it would be to me if either of you came to any harm in this affair. I like Mr. Carr, and I respect him greatly, and you know what I think of you."

"No, but I should like to," I said.

She came and stood behind my chair, putting her hands on my shoulders.

"I think—I think that you are and always will be my dear old Uncle Bob, whom I shall always love better than anybody."

This was too much.

"Laura! You don't know what you're saying!" I blazed, jumping up.

Then, as I confronted her hurt, astonished face, I realized suddenly that it was I who did not know what I was saying.

"Forgive me, my dear," I said, calming down. "I'm proud to be all that, and I hope, indeed, that you'll never think any worse of me."

And I left the room and went down-stairs, half elated, half depressed, wholly puzzled. I had learned only how far she was from guessing the secret of my heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE DROP OF GOLD."

HOWEVER matters might stand with Laura, it was her father's affairs that had to be straightened out first.

We lodged the unhappy millionaire in a small room on the same landing as our own, and I emphasized upon our *conciergerie* that no one was to be admitted to see "Monsieur Henry," who was ill and needed quiet, which was true enough.

He gave us full authority to make, in his name, any arrangements of a financial nature with the count that we could, for the recovery of that dreadful book of accounts.

First of all we had to find the count.

For this I depended chiefly on Emile Rochet's aid. If he failed us, our only resource would be chance, unless, indeed, we might encounter one of Courvoisier's gang, and bribe him to take us to his chief.

The most probable result of such a move would be that we would be conducted into an ambush where we would both be slaughtered. For we had exchanged blows with the Apaches; war was declared, and we would be marked men when we next ventured upon the Montmartre heights. With this prospect, I opened my trunk and began to make certain preparations, while Carr looked on.

"What have you got in the way of weapons?" I asked him.

"A revolver. Isn't that enough?"

"We're liable to find ourselves in ticklish places to-night," I said. "A revolver makes a noise, and the police are almost as dangerous to us as the Apaches. Better take a leaf out of the book of our friends the enemy."

And I took a cane from my trunk, pressed a catch and drew out a shining steel blade two feet long, razor-edged on both sides.

"It's silent, and it's worth ten pistols in a *mêlée*," I remarked. "You'd better carry it."

"No, thanks," said Carr, viewing the sword-cane with disfavor. "Knives are an acquired taste. I don't like 'em. I'll stick to a gun, and my fists."

"Your fists—very well. Try this, then," and I produced a most ferocious pair of brass knuckles, with spikes an inch long. I had taken them from a famous American burglar eight years ago.

"Oh, Heavens!" Carr exclaimed, recoiling.

"Put them in your pocket."

"No, no," he hastened to reply. "I shouldn't know how to use them. Besides, I don't want to mangle my victims. How did you ever get such an arsenal of unlawful weapons?"

"Accumulation of years," I said. "You haven't seen half of them. I have a full set of burglar's tools here, which may come in handy yet. Well, carry what weapons you like, but I'm not

going to despise these things because they're not sportsmanlike. We're going against human wild beasts."

"What's that little bottle you're putting in your pocket?" Carr demanded.

"Chloroform," I told him.

He shrugged his shoulders and watched me in silence as I laid out the sword-cane, and oiled and reloaded my pistol. The brass "knucks" I put back; I had to draw the line at them myself.

We still had a long time to wait before we could start on the expedition. I did not see Laura again; I was ashamed to meet her, but I believe that Carr spent a couple of hours with her. This fact did not make the time pass any more pleasantly for me, and I was thoroughly glad when, at ten o'clock, we were driving northward through the yellow glow of the gas-lit streets.

The Paris Tenderloin blazed with light and screamed with animation as we left our cab at the Hippodrome and proceeded on foot to the long steps where Rochet had met me.

No one was there. I had scarcely expected it, yet I was deeply disappointed, and my chagrin grew during the fifteen minutes that we spent waiting uselessly about the place. Rochet had failed me again.

There was just a possibility that we might stumble upon him on the Boulevard Clichy, and we spent an hour in promenading that sensational thoroughfare, and investigating some of the cafés that elbow one another along its length. We looked into the *Moulin Rouge*, *La Mort*, *Le Rat Mort*, Aristide Bruant's, and that sinister drinking-house that simulates a prison, with a guillotine decapitating a dummy figure every ten minutes, in the center of the room.

We were going out of this place, when, at the very door I met my Apache coming in.

"*Excusez, monsieur!*" he exclaimed with a gasp of astonishment and fright as he recognized me. "I was coming—I didn't know—"

"That's all right," I said, drawing him out to the sidewalk, and then, in a low voice, "Have you found what I set you to find?"

"Yes, but not till this very afternoon.

I went to the *Sacré Cœur* to meet you to-night, but—"

"That's a lie. You didn't," I commented. "But never mind. Where does Fil-de-Fer hang out?"

"*Cabaret de la Goutte d'Or*, Rue du Foin. He meets his friends there every night."

"His gang, I suppose. What sort of a place is it?"

The Apache gave an inimitable shrug.

"Not too good. But safe enough, if you go with me. I have friends who go there, and I can introduce you."

"Shall we risk it?" I said to Carr in English. "I don't trust him too much, and the Rue du Foin is one of the worst bits of Montmartre."

"Risk it? Of course!" Carr exclaimed. "What else did you bring your knives and knuckle-dusters for?"

"Look out for trouble, then, and be sure not to let anybody get behind you. Lead on, Rochet, and remember, if there's any row you'll be the first to get hurt."

The fellow broke into a torrent of protestations, but I made him stop, and he conducted us in a sulky silence westward along the boulevard, and then north through a maze of mean streets that seemed deserted and silent as death.

(To be continued.)

We met few persons, and they all gave our party a wide berth. It was an ominous sign, and I kept one eye over my shoulder most of the time until we came into an almost semicircular curving street that proved to be the Rue du Foin.

The *cabaret* of the Drop of Gold was midway in its length. It was a basement café, for its windows rose scarcely to the street level, and through the dingy glass of the door I could see the top of the broad steps going down.

Beyond this I could see nothing but a haze of smoke, and the dim heads of a number of men.

It was not very reassuring, but it was much what I had expected. I glanced at Carr, who wore an air of determination.

Then Rochet pushed open the door and went in.

Foul air, smoke, and alcohol fumes smote me in the face like a gust as I followed.

Through the reek I dazedly saw every face in the room turned toward us with savage suspicion.

I put my finger on the catch of my sword-cane.

For on the instant I expected an overwhelming rush.

THE SIGNET OF KALIKRATES.

By Helen Tompkins.

THE goddess of truth, reaching
down through the ages,
hands one to a couple of bad men.

"THERE'S a splendid monograph owned by a man named Smith in your town—I saw it last year," said John Archibald, his commonplace face lighting up. "If you are interested in such things—"

"But you see I am not—unfortunately," said Graham softly. "Now, gems—yes. I can understand and take an intelligent interest in *them*. But—"

"Gems!" Archibald looked about him uncertainly. A letter from a mutual friend had urged him to show Richard Graham every courtesy in his power, and the perplexed antiquarian knew his limitations. "I have several good stones. Frankly, they are of interest to me only in a limited way. Not that they are especially valuable—"

"I love them for their beauty," remarked Graham. "Color—sparkle—they have an especial fascination for me."

"Strange!" The old man had taken a little oblong box from the open safe. "Rubies?" he hazarded. "Do you happen to be interested in rubies—by any chance?"

Graham nodded as the kneeling man peered near-sightedly up at him. He was able to control his face fairly well, but his fingers were twitching, and it required all the self-control which he could command to hold his longing in leash—the longing to snatch the oblong box and take to his heels as fast as he could. He told himself over and over that the thing was madness—that old Archibald, dreamer that he was, was far too keen a man of business to take foolish chances with the Archibald collection; the envy of the gem-lovers of two continents.

But his eyes burned as they rested upon the rubies.

"I wonder that you are not afraid to keep them here," he said as he sifted the glowing stones through his fingers and glanced furtively at the old antiquarian under his lowered lids. "That is the Harden Ruby, is it not? I think that I saw it once—years ago."

John Archibald was tapping the case nervously with his long, lean fingers.

"Yes, that is the Harden Ruby," he said thoughtfully. "I bought it last year from the Harden heirs. I got a couple of scarabs from them at the same time. I knew old Andrew Harden when I was a boy, so I could be sure of what I was getting."

Graham was weighing the magnificent stone lovingly in his hand. He looked down into it as into a core of flame, and watched the shimmer of the crimson lights within its glowing heart.

"It is superb," he muttered faintly as he gave it back into the old man's keeping.

He had been aware for a long moment that the antiquarian had been eying him curiously. Had his longing and greed betrayed him—had the old collector for the moment caught him off his guard? His blood ran ice to his finger-tips.

Perhaps his own fear had exaggerated the magnitude of the danger.

"I have one gem in my possession that the public generally has no knowledge of," said the old man hesitatingly. "I am very anxious to show you every courtesy, of course, Mr. Graham, yet there is little that I can do. I am a bachelor and I have few friends, so that socially I can be of very little use to you. Financially I am quite as helpless; I am sim-

ply a commonplace old man, sir, with an income that suffices for my simple needs, and with a dozen fortunes—as useless to me as to others—locked behind the doors of this room. If the sight of my stones can give you pleasure—"

Graham had regained in a measure his self-control which the first sight of the rubies had robbed him of. He had near made a fool of himself—he thanked his guiding gods that he had done no worse.

In the meantime, John Archibald had evidently made a sudden resolve. He unlocked a drawer in the big steel safe—juggled with a combination—and a shallow compartment slid noiselessly open.

"This contains the gem of my collection," he said in a lower voice. "I do not know how familiar you are with the history of famous precious stones, Mr. Graham—"

The young man shook his head modestly.

"I know something of them—not very much," he confessed.

Archibald was not looking at him. He had taken a case from the compartment.

"My uncle was a famous collector," he said slowly. "He had a mania for perfect, unflawed diamonds—it amounted to a passion with him—and he had money to indulge his whims—which I have not. I have in this case, sir, a gem which once belonged to royalty."

"The monarch into whose hands it came just before my uncle's time was infatuated with a worthless woman who made the possession of the gem the conditional price of her passing favor. His love for her was so great that, although the prince knew that his country—his throne—hung in the balance when he clasped it about her throat, he scarcely weighed the matter in his own mind, but did as better men before him had done and sacrificed—you know the rest, sir, possibly better than I."

"I am a bachelor, as I have said, and the sex has little attraction for me."

"The country—the prince's country—was in the first throes of a civil war just then, and the prince himself had but little time to waste upon gauds or women. He played his part bravely, I have been told."

"But the woman tired of the royal lover, who had grown so neglectful, and the stone was practically thrown upon the market. I have heard that my uncle—he died before your time, young man—paid the highest price for it that was ever paid for a gem.

"It was all under the rose, however—my uncle's sense of honor was not so very keen, so far as diamonds were concerned—for the stone belonged to the crown jewels. The woman had as little real right to sell it as the prince had had to give it away.

"The prince died in battle after that, however, and his death did what his life could never have done—covered a multitude of sins and helped his people to make a martyr of him. His name became a thing to conjure with, and his successor kept the loss of the diamond a secret, as he had to keep many other things, for his own sake as well as for the welfare of the state.

"A skilfully made counterfeit, costing almost as much, I dare say, as the real stone would have brought, took its place among the crown jewels, and the loss of the gem was known to very few; possibly the knowledge of the fact was confined to a half-dozen people."

Graham smiled. It was an old story he knew—told of more than one jewel of matchless size and flawed heart. He wondered that the old man should believe him to be so gullible.

At that moment the case fell open, and the electric light flashed back in blinding rays from a stone such as Graham in his wildest dreams had never seen before.

"The famous Parvoff Diamond—the Eye of Heaven," said the old man, a sudden note of pride leaping to his tremulous voice. "It is an East Indian stone, and came into the possession of a private soldier of the British Empire at the time of the sacking of the palace of one of the native princes.

"How it ever came there—how and where the soldier gave it up—how it ever reached, through blood and crime, the prince's own hands—"

"I never saw anything—never dreamed of anything—like it!" Graham was saying senselessly over and over.

The room had suddenly grown sultry and close, a perspiration had broken out

on his forehead, and he was breathing as if he had been running—keeping for hours a long, killing pace up-hill.

He touched the stone reverently with his fingers. It was egg-shaped and absolutely flawless—a single well-trained glance told him that—and the light upon it flashed back in rivulets of flame. To his mind, it illuminated the entire room, and gathered to itself a radiance that fairly blinded him. It was not until the old man, watching it jealously, had again snapped the cover of the case down upon it, shutting out its light, that Graham caught his breath with something almost like a sob.

"It is perfect—magnificent!" he said harshly. "Man, I had no idea that there was anything like it on this continent!"

Archibald replaced the case in its compartment, shut the drawer, and swung the combination. When he turned again, he was once more the shambling, near-sighted antiquarian.

"Very few people know anything about the gem," he said shortly. "You thought that I was lying when I told you the diamond's history, Mr. Graham—I read it in your face. You know now that I was telling you the truth."

"I would believe anything that you cared to tell me now," said young Graham shakily. He had not quite succeeded in pulling himself together.

"I have a rather fine collection of opals, too," said the old man, hobbling to another tiny safe set well back in the wall. "It is something in the nature of an anti-climax, it is true, Mr. Graham; but I should like to have you see them. I have the mania for opals that my uncle had for diamonds," he added dryly. "They are nearer within my financial limitations, and they burn and glow and scintillate, and seem full of fire and warmth.

"Diamonds, on the contrary, are heartless things, to my mind. Not one of them of any consequence but has taken heavy and merciless toll of humanity."

He took a little wash-leather bag from the safe, and poured its contents out upon the table. There were a couple of dozen stones like iridescent bubbles—green and rose and violet, lemon and pearl and deeper rose. The old man

watched Graham sift them, also, through his fingers like common pebbles.

"They are matched and almost priceless, too, in their way," he remarked. "When I die, the Eye of Heaven will go back to its place in the royal jewel-casket. I have made my will to that effect. And I have provided, too, that the Harden Ruby shall revert to the last of the name—now a lad of five."

Graham murmured something indistinguishable under his breath.

"I am sorry that you care nothing for—other things," said the old man wistfully. "I could really interest you if you did. My father was a collector of note, sir—and his father before him. I have some bronzes and a couple of manuscripts—"

But Graham only shook his head.

"I am sorry," he said vaguely. "I, somehow, do not care to deceive you, Mr. Archibald, after your kindness to me, and I should only make a pretense of interest that I could not feel. I am the veriest ignoramus—"

"At any rate, I have something that I cannot allow you to leave without seeing," said the old man suddenly, as if yielding to an overmastering impulse. "You know something of Egyptian history, sir, do you not?"

"Very little," confessed Graham, flushing a trifle under the gaze of the keen old eyes that were bent upon him.

"My father traveled in Egypt a dozen years ago," said Archibald. "He was an old man then, but as it happened he had exceptional opportunities for securing entrance to places closed usually to the average Egyptian student. And (I have never known what means he used) he came into possession of a ring—this ring."

He took the ring from the same safe which held the opals, as he spoke, and laid it in Graham's hand. It was a cumbersome, heavy band of dark and beaten gold, set with a greenish flat stone cut in the form of the sacred beetle.

"It is the signet-ring of Kalikrates," said the old man reverently. "Kalikrates himself was a younger son of one of the Ptolemys, who came to the throne, reigned only a few months, and then became the victim of a great plague that swept the banks of the Nile.

"There is more than one old legend extant with regard to him. The Egyptians of his time called him by a name which in our own language would mean, 'The detector of deceit.' I value the ring very highly, sir. Aside from its simple intrinsic value—"

Graham was trying to appear interested. He had overstayed his time in the old house, however, and he was hunting about in his own mind for a decent excuse to escape.

"I assure you that I am very grateful to you for your kindness, sir," he said. "I had no idea—"

"Slip the ring on your own finger," urged the old man. "There has been an age-old discussion waged as to the probable deterioration of the race since the time of Thothmes. Now, during the reign of Kalikrates—"

Graham reddened. The ring was heavy, clumsy, and smaller than he had thought. He had slipped it on his finger easily enough, but he found it much more difficult to remove it. The sprawling beetle seemed suddenly hideously alive and grotesque. The room was growing almost intolerably close and warm to him again.

"Easy, sir—easy—you will bruise the flesh," said the old man eagerly. He was touching Graham's hand himself now with cool, dry fingers like the flutterings of a dead leaf. "There, I will press this side. It comes off more easily that way. You see—"

Graham chafed his aching finger, a little ashamed of his momentary irritation.

"I have stayed longer than I intended," he stammered as the old man put the signet-ring back in the safe. "I must beg your pardon, Mr. Archibald, for having trespassed so unpardonably upon your time."

"Your visit has been a source of great pleasure to me, sir," said the old man politely. "I am only sorry that your stay in town is to be such a brief one, and that my own circumstances are such that I cannot tender you the hospitalities of my own home."

Graham shook hands cordially with him, and then stumbled clumsily out of the dark, old-fashioned house into the well-lighted street. He was trying his

best to hold a tight grip on his straying wits. Who would ever have dreamed—

II.

At ten o'clock that same night he was sitting across the table from "Jim" Finney, with a bottle of liquor and two glasses between them.

"No, I don't drink—I never touch liquor when there is work on hand," he said impatiently. "What is the lay, Jim?"

Finney, with his effeminate voice, slender figure, and soft curls, drained his second glass before he answered the question.

"Did you ever hear of an old guy named Archibald?" he asked.

Graham nodded.

"I was out at his place to-night," he said. "It's not going to be such an easy thing, Finney; the old chap's too confident by half. He's got a dozen fortunes in that safe of his, and he's no fool."

"He's trusting to the stones themselves," said Finney shrewdly. "I've seen an inventory of the old chap's valuables, and it reads like a Fifth Avenue advertisement. There's a half-dozen stones there that a clever man wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole."

"Why?"

"Well, you may take the Harden Ruby, for example. Say, we got hold of that to-night. Barring the private collectors—and the most of them, I believe, are a fairly decent lot—there's nobody wants it. The police of practically every country on the globe have had a squint at it. They'd spot it in less than twenty-four hours. Cut it up? We could have that done, of course; but, you see, the trouble is—"

"I see," said Graham musingly; but he was not thinking of the ruby at all—it was the diamond that he wanted. Alesia had lost it through trickery and deceit—its reigning monarch would be only too glad to get it back without asking any awkward questions.

"I'd rather have half a dozen stones of a decent size—well matched, flawless, and of a good color—than a peck measure filled with Harden rubies," said Finney. "Of course, there is always an especial market for things like that—somewhere.

"For instance, there's that diamond that the old chap's so close-mouthed about. If a fellow could ever get to Alesia—but what earthly chance would he have of getting there, do you suppose—with a whole skin?"

"I fail utterly to see just what you are driving at, then," said Graham shortly. "We've little enough time, as I've already told you. Before noon to-morrow, the fellow whose name and letters I stole will wake up from that nasty crack on the skull that I gave him. He's clever enough to put two and two together when he does. So we've only got to-night."

"There's a lot of opals that are worth something and could be handled," said Jim placidly, ignoring the other's heat. "Martha—her sister is the old man's housekeeper—says that there are several decent diamonds and a couple of pearls which she knows where we could dispose of without awkwardness. She's a clever woman, Martha is. And, then, there is the ring, of course."

"Ring?"

"The ring—yes. The ring with the green stone set—cut in the form of a bug. They say that the old man is fairly daffy about that. You saw it—did you not?" He added the last words a trifle impatiently.

Graham caressed his finger which was still slightly swollen from the signet's pressure.

"Oh, yes, I saw it," he said moodily.

"Well, there's a fellow named Hammond—or Smith, or Jones; one name is just about as much his as the others—who wants that ring. And he is willing to pay us a pretty good sum for the job of getting it for him."

"The ring!" Graham repeated the word stupidly. "What on earth—"

"Plain bug-house, I guess," said Jim cheerfully. "All these trash-collectors are—more or less. And as unscrupulous as the devil, too—most of them are."

"Maybe old Archibald has been too chesty—been giving himself airs or something of the kind. It's none of your business, is it? You don't want the ring?"

"Not on your life!" said Graham promptly and fervently.

"Well, don't butt in, then. There's

a couple of husky chaps on the place whom I guess that Archibald is trusting to guard his treasure; but one of them has been bought, and the other will be drugged. There are a dozen different burglar-alarms, too; but Martha has been studying them for over a month, and they will be out of commission.

"The old guy don't stand well with the police, it seems. He's a stubborn old fool, and hasn't listened to advice, or he would have put the collection in a safer place long ago. What about the safe, by the way, Graham?"

"I've never seen the safe yet that I couldn't get into," said Graham gloomily. "Some more—some less—trouble, that is all. The thing looks too easy, Finney. That is what makes me so afraid of it. It's not natural to have everything coming our way, even to my very name being identical with the poor chap that I knocked out. I—don't like it."

"Oh, you're superstitious—you've seen the moon over the wrong shoulder," laughed Finney, who was the bolder spirit of the two. He leaned forward, and the two began whispering earnestly together.

III.

THE ticket-agent was very tired and very cross. He was needing his vacation badly, he told himself, as he drew a hand across his burning eyes, and he was very glad that his substitute was on the way to relieve him. There was a certain alder-fringed lake, and an ice-cold brook that emptied into it, and which he felt quite sure was swarming with hungry mountain trout. If Helen would rather—

"Two tickets to Pennisquad, sir, if you please."

The ticket-agent pushed the two tickets and the change across to the man with scarcely a glance. He was middle-aged—the agent noticed that—and he had iron-gray hair, and a rather shrewd, kindly face.

A woman clung rather heavily to his arm. She was young, dressed in mourning, and her back-thrown veil showed her face to be charming, and also revealed the fact that it was at the present time tired and white. Her hair was black, and it curled in little rings about her temples.

"Gently, Lydia," the agent heard the

man say. He fairly lifted her as he led her to a seat. "I knew that we were too early—you will remember that I told you so—too early by a good half-hour. Try to compose yourself, my dear."

He sat down on the bench beside her. As he did so a man on the other side remarked that the trains were all late, caused likely by a cloudburst up the river.

"Not our train, thank Heaven!" remarked the ticket-buyer affably. "My sister has just learned that her daughter at Pennisquad is very ill. The news has all but prostrated her. It would be very unfortunate indeed for her if we were forced to experience any unnecessary delay."

The other murmured sympathetically.

"I wonder if the police will be able to get a line on the men responsible for the robbery last night," he remarked, evidently with the laudable intention of changing the subject. "I noticed a couple of officers outside—"

"Robbery?"

The man produced a morning paper. "I live only a couple of blocks away from the house that was robbed," he said.

"And I know old Mr. Archibald by sight. I never spoke to him. They say that he is very badly cut up over the affair. Here, read it for yourself."

The man bound for Pennisquad looked at his feminine companion apprehensively, then hurriedly scanned the page which the other man had pointed out.

DARING ROBBERY.

Cracksmen Get Valuable Loot. Police in Close Pursuit. Sensational Developments Hourly Expected. Victim Bound, Gagged, and Left for Dead.

The home of John Archibald was entered by thieves some time last night, the safe broken open or blown up, and booty, the value of which is unknown, was stolen, the thieves escaping by a rear entrance even while the police, summoned by neighbors who had heard the explosion, were hammering at the front door.

Mr. Archibald was found bound and gagged—in a condition of insensibility, while the man who usually attends him was evidently in a state of stupor, and is still unable to give any coherent account of the affair.

Mr. Archibald's age and the state of his health for the past few months renders his condition, since the brutal assault, extremely serious; and, so far, his physicians have refused to allow him to see any one or to make any statement for publication. Until he can do so the actual amount of his loss cannot be accurately determined.

The thieves made a clean sweep of everything, and it is understood that the Archibald collection of gems and coins have gone with the rest. The police claim to have established the identity of the thieves, and it is believed that the lines are being so rigidly drawn that escape from the city will be made impossible and that they will be behind the bars before nightfall.

In addition to the regular men who are engaged on the case, private detectives have been summoned from Pittsburgh. They are expected to arrive today.

The man to whom the newspaper belonged received it back placidly.

"I've got more faith in the detectives than I have in the police," he said confidently.

The other man turned sharply. "My sister has fainted," he said shortly. "Call a doctor, will you? She's had heart-trouble. I'm afraid—"

He caught the woman as she fell over against him. As he did so a tide of passengers from an incoming train swept through the room. The man, holding the woman stiffly, helplessly in his arms, felt at that instant a light touch upon his shoulder.

"It's no use, Graham, the game is up," said a calm, judicial voice. "You'd better come with us quietly now, and not kick up any disturbance."

The man, without relaxing his hold upon the unconscious woman, looked up bewilderedly.

"My name is Simmons," he said blunderingly. "Harvey Simmons, from Pennisquad. My sister has fainted. She has had bad news, and I am taking—"

"That'll do you, now—for you, Graham," said the same voice. "There was a faint trace of irritation as well as of amusement in it now. "Finney's tried that dodge before. Come, my friend."

The man's bewilderment was evidently fast changing to annoyance. He looked anxiously about him, but save for one or

two more or less interested spectators who had noticed the little controversy, and heard the detective's words, no one was apparently paying any attention to them, nor did the man whom he had sent to summon the doctor return.

"My sister has fainted, you confounded fool!" he said again. "Call a doctor, will you?"

He leaned forward a little and drew the heavy mourning-veil across the white face that rested upon his knee. As he did so a man, shouldering his way past the detective, appeared upon the scene. "I am a physician," he said curtly. "What is—"

The sight of the slender, motionless figure brought a cry to his lips. He threw the men aside and dropped on one knee by the side of the unconscious woman. "Of all the fool—" he muttered, and then checked himself sharply. "What in the world are you doing with this woman—here?" he demanded harshly.

"I know *you*, doc," said the detective doubtfully. "The fact is, we mistook this party for a man named Finney, who's pulled off more than one neat job and got away afterward, disguised as a woman. But, if you say that it's all right—"

"It's not all right. You've made us miss our train, when it was a matter of life and death," said the man from Pennisquad belligerently. "You can think that over at your leisure—you dog!"

An outbound train sucked the station dry of the flood of humanity that had overflowed it.

"Here, you," said the doctor sharply, "get a carriage!"

The detective slunk back a little as the man from Pennisquad, with an anguished glance at the still unconscious woman, hurried out of the station.

"The two answered to the description all right," said the officer who was with the detective and who still stood his ground. "You see it's an old dodge of Finney's. And he's bound to be in town yet, we know—he hasn't had a chance to get away."

The woman saved the doctor the necessity of voicing the profane sarcasm that was trembling on his tongue. She moaned slightly.

"I cannot go back home," she said peevishly. "Lottie is desperately ill at Pennisquad, doctor. Please give me a stimulant of some kind—I must go to her!"

Somebody brought water and a spoon—the officious station-agent lifted the woman's head while the doctor gave her a dose of medicine.

"You'd as well let her go—where's the fellow that she was with?" said the station-agent with a glance at the detective that fairly shriveled him.

The doctor nodded. "It's a choice of evils, I guess," he said ungraciously. "I won't answer for the consequences if she goes; but I wouldn't if she stayed, for that matter. You'd better let her take it as easy as she can," he added to the man who had reentered the station.

"I couldn't find a carriage, and our train hasn't gone yet, after all," said the man anxiously. "She'll fret herself to death, if she stays. If you'll help us on the train, doctor, I'll take my chances with her—rather than stay here."

The doctor looked doubtful, but steadying the patient on one side while the brother supported her on the other, the three walked slowly toward the train. An officer, evidently watching all outgoing passengers, made a step forward; but the chagrined detective, still lingering, said something to him in a low voice and he dropped back a little.

"I wish that you'd go with us, doctor—I'd make it worth your while," said the woman's brother nervously when they had made the woman as comfortable as possible in the rear car.

The doctor hesitated, his hand on the woman's pulse. The conductor, loitering through the car, looked at the little group keenly. Farther toward the front of the car, an elderly man with a good-humored face and a badge securely hidden by his tightly-buttoned coat, watched the conductor.

"I don't know," said the doctor feebly. "I've an appointment for ten o'clock. And what on earth my wife will think has become of me—"

He snapped the lid of his watch shut and beckoned to the conductor.

"If I run on down to Pennisquad with these people, when can I get back to town?" he asked.

"Twelve-fifteen, sir—it's only a matter of twenty miles to Pennisquad," said the conductor. "You can stay there half an hour and then take the fast express back."

"I'd better do it then," said the doctor resignedly. "Where does Lottie live—in town?"

"She lives half a mile from Pennisquad. Her husband is a market-gardener. If I had known—"

"You can take a carriage at the station," said the conductor, eying the woman's garrulous brother much as the detective had done.

The conductor sauntered on through the car, turned, retraced his steps, and in obedience to a slight gesture dropped into the seat beside the good-natured man, who was so anxious to spare people's feelings that he kept his badge of office hidden, just as the train pulled out of the station.

"Well, who are they?" the man asked.

"The tall one is Dr. Lucas, from the sanatorium here in town. He's a pretty decent sort of chap. I don't know the woman, but the doctor evidently does, or he would never have left town with her. She looks awful sick. The man—"

"What has the man got to do with them?"

"I don't know—I never saw him before. He appears to be a connection of the sick woman in some way—maybe he's her brother. I don't know him."

"He's the one that I want to look out for, then," said the good-natured man slowly, and with quite another look on his face. "Get him up this way on some pretext—will you?"

The conductor nodded, but his intervention was not necessary. The sight of his sister's pale face evidently made the man from Pennisquad nervous. He left her in the doctor's care and drifted miserably toward the other end of the car. The conductor went on into the smoking-compartment.

The man from Pennisquad singled out the middle-aged gentleman with the sympathetic face who was sitting alone, and in obedience to another slight gesture he dropped into the seat beside him as the conductor had done a moment before.

"This is rotten luck that I'm having," he said forlornly. "Any other time, Lydia's husband would have been in town. Now—"

"What is the matter?" asked the other encouragingly. He was an old man from Bradford's Agency, and he knew Graham well. He was telling himself positively now that the man beside him was not Graham—nor any one whom he had ever seen before.

"Well, you see, my sister back there, is an invalid. Lucas has been treating her for over a year now. Decent chap, that. I could tell you things— And very moderate in his charges, too, so my brother-in-law says. I only came up from Pennisquad myself this morning.

"Found Horace gone, and, five minutes after his train pulled out, here comes a telegram from Pennisquad, saying that Lottie, my niece, is not expected to live. And I know from Lucas's looks that he's doubtful whether Lydia makes it or not, if Lottie—"

His voice broke a little and he looked gloomily out of the car-window.

The detective muttered some platitude half under his breath, but his mind was elsewhere. He knew that the town had been thrashed relentlessly—that every outgoing train had been closely watched. He knew, moreover, that the law had two of the cleverest rogues on the face of the earth to deal with, and that the two were playing for the highest possible stakes.

There was nothing for him to do now but to drop off at Pennisquad and take the first train back to town, he told himself dismally. It was possible, of course, that the two thieves, arrangements having been made beforehand, had dropped into a boat while the police were still hammering at the door of the house on Larch Street, and had drifted, unnoticed, down the river.

He worried over the aspect of the affair for some time, discouraging conversation once he felt sure that the man beside him was not the one whom he sought, proffering the morning paper at last in order to have his thoughts to himself.

The fact of the business was, that all of the particulars of the robbery had not been given out to the public.

Stirred by his loss, and stung by the fact that a man whom he had himself allowed entrance to his home had taken advantage of his hospitality to rob him, John Archibald had rallied all the strength of his keen intellect in order to retrieve his blunder. He had been able to recall every smallest detail of Graham's visit to the house—even to the difficulty with which the young man had met when he attempted to remove the signet-ring from his finger.

He told the police, emphatically, that when they succeeded in finding the man who had robbed him, they would find the third finger on that man's left hand still bruised and swollen from the pressure of the sacred beetle carved upon the signet of Kalikrates.

The man from Bradford's Agency, Greer, looked across at the left hand of his companion—the hand which was nearest him and which held the unfolded newspaper—for the second time. It did not disappoint him, that the third finger of that hand bore neither bruise nor discoloration.

He had already felt quite as assured that the man could not be Finney, whom he had never seen, any more than Graham, whom he remembered to have once arrested on some trivial charge—years before. It did not need the corroborative evidence of the unmarred finger to convince him that he was following the wrong trail.

He tired of inaction after a little, and, remembering suddenly that there was a telegraph station ten miles between the town he had just left and Pennisquad, he quitted his seat with the intention of either coaxing or browbeating the conductor into letting him off there. He climbed awkwardly across the knees of his companion, who was now apparently immersed in his paper, and walked down the aisle, not in the direction of the rear end of the car, but toward the smoking-compartment, into which he had just seen the conductor disappear.

As he laid his hand upon the rear of of the last seat to steady himself—they were going at a fair rate of speed, the roadway was rough, and the car was rocking like a ship in a gale—he saw a face in the wide mirror before him; a face alert, keen, not unkindly, and a

hand raised to unsnap the catch of an eye-glass.

Recognition — comprehension—action—came in a flash.

The detective wheeled, his revolver barked a staccato challenge, and the "doctor's" shattered wrist dropped the pistol which had appeared only the fraction of a second later than the detective's own. His own shot followed closely, but the bullet sped past harmlessly.

In an instant the whole car was in an uproar. The man from Pennisquad sprang up with a snarl, and he and the detective swayed up and down the aisle.

The man with the shattered wrist snatched at the bell-cord, and a shrill whistle from the engine answered the signal to lessen speed. The invalid, with surprising agility, sprang forward, but the wrestling trio—the wounded man had joined the others by this time—fighting down the narrow aisle hemmed her helplessly in. Twice the detective's revolver spoke, but both shots went wild. He dropped the pistol then, or it was wrenched from his grasp and, still fight-

ing like a bulldog, he went down with the other two uppermost.

By this time the train had jangled and jarred roughly to a halt—a dead stop—and the conductor and a couple of other men, stumbling through the débris of shattered glass, entered through the car door. "Hands up, men!" said a sharp voice. "Now!"

The woman—Finney in disguise—gave one despairing look at the rear door of the car and then surrendered.

"You're a dead ringer of Lucas, Graham," he said cheerfully. "How in the world did you manage it?"

But Graham, nursing his shattered wrist, had turned sulky, too, and would not answer.

One by one the prisoners were safely ironed. As he slipped the cuff over Graham's uninjured hand, the detective glanced at the swollen, discolored finger and grinned.

Across the gulf of buried and forgotten centuries, the dead Kalikrates had vanquished error and deceit and brought triumph to the truth.

WOODLAND VESPERS.

By Clarence Urmey.

AT eve I climb a vine-clad hill,
And, looking toward the west,
I gaze upon a distant slope
With groves of redwood dressed;
It lies across a dark ravine
With cottage lights aglow,
Where faint farm sounds steal up the glen
And down the valley blow.

I have not very long to wait,
When far in Twilightland
An angel sets the evening star
With gently trembling hand;
I hear the wind die down the vale,
The herd-bells cease their tune,
And incense unperceived by day
Along the air is strewn.

I watch the star—it slowly falls
Like pentecostal fire,
Down, down until it tips with gold
The tallest redwood spire;
'Tis time to pray an evening prayer
And hum an evening hymn,
Then soon with sleep go, starry led,
Down dream-paths cool and dim.

IN THE TARANTULA'S SKEIN.*

By J. Aubrey Tyson.

From the lives of three or four men hours are taken bodily, while a mysterious enemy of humanity works its will.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

GEORGE RIPLEY, secret-service agent, is detailed to ferret out the circumstances of the intermittent extinguishing of the White Shoal Light on the coast of Massachusetts. Going out to the light with Torrens, the old keeper, who is under suspicion, he meets, in a boat, Baintree and Wilson, who also have been inspecting the trouble. A huge wave comes and swamps the boat of the latter two, and they are drowned.

At the lighthouse is found the body of Cowden, Torrens's quondam assistant, with a revolver in its hand. There is no explanation whatsoever of the trouble. Suddenly the fog-bell, which is supposed to ring during all foggy weather, is silenced. Ripley, who is in one of the lower rooms of the lighthouse, rushes to find Torrens, whose duty is caring for the bell. Torrens is nowhere to be found.

CHAPTER V.

THE SPELL OF SUSPICION.

FOR several seconds my scattered wits left me no defense against the assaults of rapidly multiplying fears.

For the first time in my life I experienced—more strongly than I ever had imagined them to be—the terrible sensations that overwhelm a shrinking, trembling coward.

And yet I may say in perfect truth that I was not a prey to superstitious fancies, nor did I stand in fear of physical violence.

The sudden, awful fate that first had overtaken Baintree and Wilson and then had compassed the death of Cowden had, in a measure, prepared me for this mysterious disappearance of the old keeper. One horrible, awe-inspiring incident had succeeded another so quickly that most of my sensibilities were as benumbed as those of a soldier who, with his comrades falling to right and left of him, thinks only of the accomplishment of the grim task at which his superiors have set him.

The fears that overcame me were those that had their origin in what appeared

to be my utter isolation and helplessness in an hour when I was confronted by the most responsible task to which I ever had been assigned. If Torrens also had succumbed to the mysterious fate that had sent Baintree, Wilson, and Cowden to their deaths, what was to be meted out to me?

It was not death that I feared, but disgrace. Ignorant of the nature of the mechanism of the lamp and bell, how was I to keep them working through the night? Several days might pass before I would be able to get into communication with the shore, and during those days and nights the loss of ships and human lives might be the price of my inability to keep bell and beacon working on this billow-battered shoal.

While, incapable of motion, I was standing thus, my gaze turned seaward. With a thrill of satisfaction, I perceived that, though the sky was heavily overcast, the fog was lifting so rapidly that I was able to see distinctly a big four-masted schooner that was passing the lighthouse, about two miles distant.

Under these circumstances, was it not possible that Torrens himself had silenced the bell?

Stepping quickly to one side of the

*Began July All-Story Magazine. Single copies 10 cents.

lantern, I looked down on the platform that girdled the tower at the level of the watch-room.

Immediately below me was the bell, and a couple of paces to the left of this I saw the figure of a bareheaded man, kneeling, with his right shoulder resting against the rail.

It was Torrens!

With mingled feelings of joy and fear, satisfaction and horror, I watched the figure with fascinated eyes. At first it seemed to be inert, then I saw the bowed head move slightly upward. A few moments later the old keeper put on his cap, and rose. He had been praying.

With a low cry of relief, I turned again to the stairs. As I reached the watch-room the door leading to the platform was opened, and Torrens entered.

"You were callin', sir?" he asked.

"The bell has stopped," said I.

"Aye, the fog has lifted," Torrens answered, as his gaze wandered to where the body of Cowden lay. Then, with a sudden affectation of cheerfulness, he added: "Well, sir, I suppose you'll be wantin' a bite of somethin' now."

"Not yet," I answered promptly. "Before the light gets dimmer I want you to explain to me the working of the lamp and bell."

The keeper, stroking the gray fringe around his face, looked at me abstractedly.

"There are only two of us here now," I went on, "and in view of the fact that disaster has overwhelmed the three men who had the watch last night, it is just as well, perhaps, that each of us should be prepared to relieve the other."

Torrens nodded approvingly.

"Aye, sir, you are right," he said. "I ought to have thought of that before."

Pausing for a few moments, he let his gaze rest on the little engine, then he continued:

"There ain't anything below here, except the oil-room, that has anything to do with the light or bell. Every mornin' we pump up enough oil from the oil-room to fill the tank of the lamp. Clockwork machinery feeds the four circular burners all night, and after the burners are lit and the clockwork set goin' there ain't much for the watcher in the watch-room to do but to stay awake and keep

his eye peeled for the comin' of fog or snow.

"Sometimes the smoke of forest fires gets out here to sea, and when it settles heavy we've got to keep the bell a goin'. If the light above goes wrong, you couldn't fail to know it, settin' here, for the lamp we burn in the watch-room ain't none too bright, and the glow of the big one comes to you down the stairs and through the windows."

Then bidding me follow him, he led the way up to the lantern, where, raising the big cone of prisms, he showed me the four circular wicks and explained to me how they were trimmed and fed. The mechanism of the clockwork pump and the feed pipes I found to be extraordinarily simple, and in my presence Torrens lighted the big lamp for the night and lowered the cone.

Returning to the watch-room, the keeper explained the mechanism of the engine and the manner in which it rang the bell. This done he took from a little shelf a volume containing rules for the conduct of lighthouses, together with illustrated directions for the use of their equipments.

As the keeper replaced the volume, he nodded toward a second book which lay on the same shelf.

"The other is the 'International Signal Code,'" he said carelessly. "I reckon you won't have no use for that."

"Why is it here?" I asked.

"Most lighthouses has 'em," the keeper replied. "When a lighthouse is on shore, passin' ships—specially sailin' vessels on long voyages—ask the keeper to report them. This is easy enough to do, when there's a newspaper near you that gets Associated Press service, but most newspapers know the White Shoal is too far out to be in communication with the land more than two or three times a month at most, so they don't waste time or money burnin' signal lights for us."

The keeper now suggested that we go below in order that he might make preparations for dinner. I assented, and Torrens led the way down-stairs.

Without pausing in the living-room, we made our way to the sleeping-room. Here the old keeper observed something that caused him to halt abruptly.

Following the direction of his glance, I saw a wooden soap-box standing on end near the head of one of the cots. On the box were a glass, a bottle, and a little heap of white muslin.

"What's these things doin' here?" the keeper muttered wonderingly. "Jack wasn't the sort of fellow to let things lay around like this."

Though the coverings of the cot were in their proper order, the pillow still retained the impression of the head that had lain on it last and the gray blanket was somewhat wrinkled.

"Hadn't we better have a light?" I asked, for it was after sundown now, and the dark clouds were shortening the period of twilight.

"Aye," said Torrens quietly, and a few moments later he had lighted a lamp in a bracket on the wall.

Picking up the bottle, I raised it to my nose.

"Whisky—and empty," I muttered as I put the bottle down. "Was Cowden a drinking man?"

"Once in a while he'd take his nip, sir, but not often," replied the keeper. "Jack wasn't what you'd call a drinkin' man."

Unfolding the muslin gingerly, I found within it a mass of flaxseed.

It was plain that the muslin and the flaxseed had served as a poultice, and I asked Torrens whether, while he had been in charge of the lighthouse, he had kept a supply of flaxseed on hand. He replied that he had done so, and this probably had been taken from a medicine-box on the top shelf of one of the cupboards.

While Torrens was making this explanation, something under the cot caught his eye and, stooping, he drew out a coal-scuttle in which rested a stove-poker.

The keeper looked at the scuttle with puzzled eyes.

"Is that the place in which it is usually kept?" I asked.

Torrens shook his head negatively.

"It ain't time for fires yet," he muttered, "and besides that, the only two stoves we've got belong to the kitchen and the livin'-room. The livin'-room stove was taken down in the spring, and ain't been put up yet, so there ain't no

use for a scuttle above the kitchen. Anyhow, we never kept no scuttles here. I'd better take it down, I reckon."

"No," said I. "We'll leave it for the present where you found it. But, before you put it back again, let us see if there is anything else under the cots."

Nothing else was found, however, and after returning the scuttle to the place from which Torrens had drawn it, we threw the poultice out of the window and carried the box and bottle to the kitchen on the floor below. Torrens had been about to hurl the bottle after the poultice, but I restrained him.

I was resolved that while I was in the lighthouse I would permit to go unchallenged no incident, however trivial.

That the bottle had contained whisky was obvious, but the odor of whisky is sufficiently strong to disguise the odors of other liquids which have even more deleterious effects on the human system than the distillation of rye. I carefully corked the bottle, therefore, and put it into one of the cupboards.

While Torrens busied himself with preparations for dinner, I remained with him in the kitchen, and, as the atmosphere of the place became charged with the odors of frying ham and boiling potatoes, we talked of the manner in which the lighthouse was constructed, the formation of the shoal, the course followed by vessels as they passed on their way up and down the coast, and of the method of receiving supplies of oil, coal, water, and provisions.

While in the kitchen both of us avoided all references to the mysterious extinguishment of the light or the probable causes of the strange and abrupt departure of Baintree and Wilson and the death of Cowden.

By the time the meal was finished, I had made a careful study of the old keeper and had obtained much detailed information concerning the responsibilities, daily routine and diversions of the custodian of a lighthouse.

I also learned that twice each month a lighthouse-tender—a steam-vessel of about fifteen hundred tons—visited the shoal and left supplies of oil, water, and coal. On these occasions the building usually was inspected by a representative of the Lighthouse Board.

The keeper was required to find his own provisions, and these were brought from Charlesport, sometimes in one of the lighthouse boats, but more frequently in an auxiliary sloop belonging to Captain Samuel Yarnall, a Charlesport fisherman, whose first wife was a sister of Torrens.

Landings on the shoal usually were made at low water, at which time a strip of sand that was free from rocks was exposed on the land side of the shoal. This strip sloped so abruptly, however, that at low tide there was a depth of seven fathoms of water at a point only a hundred yards from low-water mark.

The bell was on the east side of the tower, and the oil-room door, by which the building was entered, was on the north, or landward side.

The keeper also told me that under the oil-room was an unlighted compartment containing a fresh water tank, and a bin sufficiently large to hold six tons of coal.

When our meal was finished, Torrens addressed himself to the task of washing the dishes, while I, leaving the keeper alone in the kitchen, visited each of the apartments above.

A careful examination of these convinced me that, unless an inspection of the coal and water compartment should afford me ground for suspicion, there was no place in the building in which an intruder could find concealment.

Thus far it was possible to find only two theories for the extinguishment of the light, namely—the existence of some defect in the mechanism by which the lamp was operated, or a conspiracy to which a custodian of the tower was a party. To both of these theories there were obvious objections.

While defective mechanism might result in the extinguishment of the light, it was altogether improbable that it could light it again.

In view of the fact that the entire crew of the lighthouse had been changed twice, and that neither of these changes had been effective in preventing the extinguishment in heavy weather, it seemed unreasonable to assume that apparently trustworthy men, coming from other sections of the country, could, within such a brief period, be prevailed upon to enter into such a dangerous conspiracy.

A third theory—somewhat vague and absurd, indeed—had suggested itself to my mind. I asked myself whether or not it was possible that, owing to some strange meteorological condition, due to conflicting currents or the action of waves on the shoal, some sort of mist, not visible elsewhere, might envelop the tower and shut in its light.

In justice to myself, however, I will say that the idea seemed so wildly improbable that I promptly dismissed it from my thoughts.

It will be remarked that since my arrival at the shoal the subject of the extinguishment of the light had been uppermost in my mind, despite the horror that had been impressed upon it by the deaths of the three men who had tenanted the tower on the preceding night.

Though I well knew that an investigation into the causes of these tragedies would constitute a part of the task to which I had been assigned, I decided that this must remain, for the time being at least, subordinate to the purpose of my visit to the shoal.

I was now in charge of the lighthouse on the White Shoal, and had been ordered to keep the light burning every minute of the night. From sunset until sunrise this must be my task.

By daylight only would I find it possible to devote myself to inquiries concerning the failure of others to do the things that I now was required to do.

I did not doubt that the cause of the light's disappearance was in some degree responsible for the sudden flight of Baintree and Wilson.

It was possible that Cowden, who had committed suicide without having learned of the disaster that had overtaken them, might have had something to fear as the result of their safe arrival on shore.

Had he driven them out, or had they stolen away to report that they had discovered that he was a party to a conspiracy to darken the lighthouse while storms were raging?

Had he taken his life because he knew that his faithlessness was known?

Thus far Torrens had impressed me favorably. But Torrens and Cowden long had been in a position of intimate relationship. The old keeper had told me much, but had he told me all?

And so I resolved that, while I was in charge of the White Shoal light, I would trust no man.

I must not sleep!

CHAPTER VI.

ACCORDING TO THE CODE.

TORRENS was still below, when, glancing at my watch, I saw it was seven o'clock.

Stepping to the window of the living-room, I looked out over the sea.

Sky and waters were dark, but far—far in the distance I saw the faintly glowing beams which the apparently insignificant cone in the lantern above me was projecting to the unseen horizon.

For the last ten minutes the clapping and bellowing of the waves on the shoal had been growing louder—so loud, indeed, that, despite all my efforts to accustom myself to the situation, I began to find it impossible to free my mind from a rapidly increasing sense of alarm.

At times the very shoal itself seemed to shudder while attempting to rally from the shocks caused by the terrific impact of hundreds of tons of water which hissed and crashed and rumbled the curses and threats of the angry sea.

Though the casement was closed, I distinctly heard the fierce rush of the blast that was heralding the approach of a storm. Had I been on the deck of a vessel, I doubtless would have felt no fear while viewing the threatening aspect of the night; for a vessel is a thing of life and motion, dominated by the active minds of men who are trained to fight the sea.

But the chill, gray, stone cone in which I stood now seemed to me to be no more than a mere battered, time-worn plaything of relentless waves. Within the last four hours the heaving waters had engulfed two of the three men who had passed the preceding night within its ill-omened walls which now were sheltering the body of the third.

Were these thundering billows clamoring for the lives of the two living men who occupied the building now?

I started violently as I felt a hand fall on my shoulder. Turning, I looked into the bloodshot eyes of Torrens.

"Your nerve's not failin', sir, I hope," the keeper said, surveying me with an expression of apprehension. "Why, you just jumped as if you seen poor Jack Cowden's ghost."

"I'll be steady enough in half an hour or so," I answered. "These waves you've got out here have shaken me up a bit, I guess. I didn't hear you come up the stair; and when you touched me on the shoulder, I—"

"Aye, we'll have a nasty night," said Torrens solemnly. "The tide's a risin', and there's like to be some heavy poundin' on the shoal before the sun is up."

I turned apprehensively toward the window and looked out.

"Will the breakers be much worse than they are now?" I asked.

The keeper shook his head gravely.

"Lord bless you, sir, they haven't begun to talk yet. In an hour from now the old Atlantic will throw its white arms around this tower and make love to it in a way that you won't be likely to forget, if you live to be as old as me. I tell you, these confidential talks of a stormy sea, 'specially when it begins to brag of all the great things it can do, ain't the pleasantest sort o' talk a landsman wants to listen to."

"Well, however confidential the talks may be, there is nothing to be gained by listening to them, if they don't aid us in solving the mystery of the light," I replied.

Torrens nodded.

"Shall we go to the watch-room?" he asked. "Everything is snug below."

I assented; and the keeper led the way to the room above.

Upon entering the watch-room, we seated ourselves at the table. Without asking me whether or not I was inclined to play, Torrens opened a checker-board and arranged the pieces.

"Checkers and books is the only things that's left to us on a night like this," the keeper explained as he marked my hesitation. "Ten minutes from now we won't be able to hear each other talk across the table."

These words had scarcely left the keeper's mouth, when there was a sudden crash below, and the lighthouse trembled from top to bottom. A feeling of faintness seized me, and, with an ex-

clamation of alarm, I sprang to my feet. The old man rose also and laid a hand on my arm.

"Easy, easy, sir!" he said reassuringly. "There's no danger. We'll have far worse than that before the night is over. Even if they came a hundred times as strong as that one, the mornin' would find our old gray tower safe and sound."

"What was it?" I asked breathlessly.

"Only a wave," the keeper answered with a smile. "You'll get used to 'em by and by."

A few moments later another, larger than the first, made the old structure sway and shudder.

"Here they are," observed Torrens complacently.

Rallying all my powers of self-control, I now steadily returned the keeper's questioning gaze. He quickly marked the change that was coming over me, and the look of apprehension faded from his features, and he glanced again toward the checker-board.

"Will you have the red or black, sir?" he asked, and he began to finger the pieces.

"Neither—yet," I answered promptly. "Let us talk a little while, if we can. I want you to tell me something of your unfortunate young friend, Jack Cowden."

As we seated ourselves again at the table, the keeper glanced over his shoulder to where the body of his dead assistant lay beneath the blanket.

The old man sighed and shook his head.

"There ain't much to tell," he answered gloomily. "It's just a simple story of a fishin' lad that went all wrong when he fell in love with a pretty girl who thought herself too high for him."

"The girl was Sally Lane, the daughter of old Captain Bill, who used to own the biggest shipyard in Charlesport. Bill made quite a pile of money; and when he was pretty much along in years, he married the parson's daughter."

"Sally was their only child and was just turned sixteen when her mother died. Bill took to drink, sent Sally away to school, began to speculate, and lost his money. He sent for Sally, then; and when she got back, the folks in Charlesport weren't long in seein' that her fancy school had spoiled her. Her father was

ruined; but she wore fine clothes and tossed her head at all the plain-fashioned folks and ways of Charlesport.

"And yet she seemed to still have a sort of fondness for her old sweetheart, Jack Cowden; and Jack's love for the girl grew stronger, though Sally put it plainly to him that she had higher ideas for herself than to marry him."

"A year ago this month she went to Portland; and before she went, she turned poor Jack down for good and all. In Portland she lived with her aunt; and word come to Charlesport that old Captain Bill's girl was makin' lots of friends and havin' pretty lively times in Portland and Augusta."

"When folks in Charlesport told Jack these stories, a big change came over the lad, and I don't believe he ever laughed aloud again. He fancied every one was watching him and makin' sport of his pain. Then he came out here to me."

"He didn't want no more fishin', he told me, and he asked me if I couldn't give him a berth out here with me. My assistant had turned up drunk a few days before, and Jack knew I was about to fire him."

"I gave the job to Jack, and he proved to be the likeliest lad I ever had out here to help me. He never had no cravin' to go ashore; and, though he was a bit moody at times, he was always willin'—fairly studyin' out new things to do to make life cheerful for us both in this lonely tower. All went well until—until—"

I heard no more. From without there came a sound like that of a terrific thunder-clap, and the tower trembled more violently that it had done before.

The room seemed to be whirling round me. Shaking like a leaf, I staggered to my feet, but, overcome by a strange feeling in the interior of my body, I gasped for breath and sank into my chair.

My lips were parched, and perspiration was breaking out on my forehead.

My alarm was intensified by a recognition of the fact that Torrens was suffering almost as much as I.

The old keeper, who, only a few minutes before, had spoken so confidently of the stability of the tower, was trembling, too, and his face, which had been florid before, was gray as ashes now.

He was standing at the foot of the stairway that led up to the lantern, and, with his frightened eyes turned toward mine, he appeared to be listening intently.

Struck by his attitude, I listened, too. The waves now seemed to be on the point of engulfing the tower, smiting the structure higher and delivering their blows in more rapid succession.

Starting suddenly, Torrens looked upward to where the iron stairway entered the floor above.

For the moment I forgot my fears.

"The light's all right?" I shouted anxiously.

The keeper, glancing toward me again, was about to speak, when he suddenly checked himself and raised a warning finger.

Then, mingling with the roar of the waters that lashed the tower, there came another sound, rather more quick and sharply defined than those that rose around us.

As I listened two other sounds, similar to the first, succeeded it.

"What is it, Torrens?" I demanded breathlessly.

"Signal-guns," the old man answered hoarsely. "But, lad—thank Heaven—the lamp's a burnin'!"

As he spoke, the keeper crossed quickly to the window and looked out. I followed, but, peering over his shoulder, I could see nothing at first, for water was trickling down the outside of the glass. At length, however, I saw, faintly in the distance, a greenish glow that disappeared a moment afterward.

"The code—the code!" cried Torrens fiercely, and, turning abruptly, he thrust me aside and rushed to the little shelf on which I had seen him lay the book which, earlier in the evening, he had assured me was scarcely worth shelf-room in the lighthouse. Seizing it now, he held it toward me.

"Quick with it—to the lantern!" he commanded.

Then, leading the way to the stairway, he began to draw off his canvas coat.

We mounted the narrow stairway two or three steps at a bound; then, having entered the lantern, Torrens spread out his coat in such a manner as to obscure the light on the south side of the gleam-

ing cone. For several seconds, with his face turned toward the sea, he held the coat in this position; then, with an abrupt movement, he drew it aside.

"The book, lad—the book!" he cried impatiently.

I placed it in his hands.

A few moments later I saw, well out at sea, a little row of yellow lights. A powerful search-light flashed toward us; but this was withdrawn almost immediately.

"Now—now—look sharp!" Torrens muttered, as if he was speaking to himself.

From the point at which the yellow lights were shining, there now glowed other lights—red, green, and blue. Only one of these was displayed at a time; and while each was several times repeated, the colors were not displayed in regular succession. As each color appeared, Torrens recorded it in the back of the code-book.

The signals continued for about a minute and a half; then they ceased abruptly. Torrens dropped the book, and once more held his coat before the cone. Scarcely had he done this, when the distant vessel's search-light flashed again toward the lighthouse.

Flinging his coat to the floor, Torrens picked up the book and, with this in his hands, hurried to the stairway, calling to me to follow him.

"Is it a vessel in distress?" I asked when we found ourselves again in the watch-room.

Torrens made no answer. Seating himself at the table, he swept to the floor the checker-board and pieces with a rapid movement of his arm, then he opened the code-book and forthwith proceeded to decipher the message that he had just received.

I watched him anxiously. In the excitement attending this new incident of the night, the thundering waves and the shivering of the lighthouse were forgotten.

At length, with a heavy groan, Torrens leaned forward and hid his face in his hands.

"In Heaven's name, what is it, man?" I demanded, laying a hand on one of the keeper's shoulders.

Shaking off my hand, the old man rose

and slowly mounted the stairway leading to the lantern. Here he raised his coat from the floor, and once more held it outspread before the cone.

Again the search-light found the tower.

Torrens withdrew the coat and stepped back. For several seconds he stood immovable; then, with marked deliberation, he passed the coat twice before the cone.

The searchlight flashed toward us again, then after assuming a vertical position for several moments it disappeared.

The keeper turned to me.

"That's all," he muttered brokenly.

I led the way back to the watch-room.

While the mind of the keeper was engrossed by the exchange of signals, I realized the importance of allowing him to proceed without interruption. As we paused beside the table, however, this new mystery and the keeper's continued silence excited within me feelings of resentment and distrust.

"What ship was that?" I demanded angrily.

The keeper's eyes were glaring wildly as he turned to me abstractedly.

"Aye, aye, the devil's in it!" I heard him mutter.

My blood ran cold, but my brain was burning as I seized him by the shoulder.

"Speak, man—speak!" I cried. "What ship was that?"

By the expression that overspread his features then, one might have thought that he was only half conscious of my presence in the room.

"It was the gunboat Montauk, with Sam Briarthwaite aboard," he answered moodily. "The light's been out three hours!"

CHAPTER VII.

AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

UTTERLY dumfounded, I tightened my grip on Torrens's shoulder and, incapable of speech, stood staring at his haggard face.

"The light's been out three hours," the old keeper repeated, nodding gloomily. "Aye, I knew it before I heard the signal-guns. I knew it when I found myself a standin' at the bottom of the lantern-stair."

"You knew?" I muttered hoarsely.

"I felt just then as you did," Torrens said. "You know now what it is to have that queer, sinkin' feelin' I was tellin' you of."

Stepping back from the keeper, I drew out my watch.

It was half past ten!

It had been only a few minutes after seven when Torrens and I had seated ourselves at the watch-room table with the checker-board between us.

I recalled again that strange, smug, mocking smile that was on the face of Captain Sam Briarthwaite when I had seen him last, just as I was starting for New England "to keep the White Shoal Light burning every minute of the night." And now, under Briarthwaite's very eyes, George Ripley had met his first failure as a secret-service agent!

For several moments Torrens and I, pacing the floor restlessly, were silent.

"Let me have a copy of the Montauk's message," I said at last.

The big, rough hand of the keeper wrote it out laboriously and gave it to me. I read as follows:

GUNBOAT MONTAUK, BRIARTHWAITE.

Light out three hours. Ripley there, one pass—not there, two. Search-light; then one pass for each man in light-house.

"Is that all he said?" I asked as, crumpling up the paper, I dropped it to the floor.

"That's all, sir; but it's pretty near enough, I reckon," the keeper answered wearily.

Leaving to Torrens the task of continuing the watch, I went below to the living-room. There, pacing the floor or sitting on a chair with my face in my hands, I spent the two most miserable hours I had passed in all my life.

I soon saw the importance of freeing myself from the terrible sense of mortification that had overwhelmed me, however. In one respect, my commission had proved a failure. For that failure I must now prepare myself to give a satisfactory reason; and yet this very reason naturally would involve a solution of the mystery of the extinguished light.

Convinced that in the tower there was only one living man besides myself, it was clear to me that, if the light had

been extinguished this night by human agency, Torrens was the culprit.

During the three hours that the light was out I had been unconscious. Had Torrens drugged me while I was eating in the kitchen? It was possible, of course. But was it probable?

It seemed to me that it was altogether so.

This proceeding and those that followed it would seem to constitute simplicity itself. Torrens and Cowden had been fellow conspirators. Cowden, believing that Baintree and Wilson had discovered his secret, had committed suicide. By what means he and Torrens had effected the extinguishment of the light after they had been removed from the lighthouse, I did not know; but this I would learn in time.

In order to demonstrate the truth of my theory, I also would have to obtain possession of the drug which Torrens had used upon me. With evidence such as this in my possession, I might succeed in an effort to compel the old man to confess the nature of the motive which had impelled him to commit these crimes.

In the meantime, however, it was essential that Torrens should be given no reason to suspect that I was preparing to lay the commission of these crimes to his charge.

Becoming more and more convinced of his guilt and of the perfect simplicity of his methods, my respect for the man was constantly increasing. He was, by long odds, the cleverest actor I had ever known.

It was after midnight when, entering the watch-room, I saw Torrens standing by the southern window, looking out. He heard me enter, and glanced over his shoulder, but did not speak.

"The sea is calming down a bit," I said.

"Yes," he answered half-absently. "The gale has passed. An offshore breeze and an ebbin' tide will make all quiet enough in an hour or so."

Glancing round the poorly-furnished room, I saw that the keeper had replaced the checker-board and pieces on the table. Convinced that I had identified the true culprit, and failing to see any prospect of further action in the course of the next five or six hours, I was no longer loath

to seek some sort of diversion for my tired thoughts.

"If you still have a mind for a game of checkers—" I began; but the old man interrupted me.

With an impatient shrug of his shoulders, he replied:

"No, sir; I have no mind for checkers now."

"Well, then, since two of us seem to be unable to maintain a more effective watch than one, I think I will go below and look over the volumes in your library."

The old keeper, frowning, turned toward me quickly.

"It's well for you, lad, that you can take the thing so lightly," he said in a tone of reproach.

"Ah, well," I sighed, "perhaps we will have our chance another night."

Torrens nodded wearily.

"Perhaps—perhaps," he said.

I returned to the living-room, but I was in no state of mind to seek solace in one of the keeper's well-thumbed volumes.

It was scarcely probable that Torrens would venture to leave the living-room while he had the watch; so I thus was afforded an excellent opportunity to search the various rooms below the watch-room, had I found any grounds for the belief that such a search would yield evidence of his guilt. But I was satisfied that a search for this must prove fruitless.

The keeper and I had arrived at the lighthouse together, and it was plain that if he had had anything of an incriminating nature in his possession, it still must be concealed somewhere about his person. I could hope to secure this only while he was sleeping. I expected to find little else than the vial which had contained the drug that rendered me unconscious.

I had been pacing the room for more than five minutes, when my gaze chanced to rest on a little piece of torn paper, about an inch square, lying on the rim of a wicker waste-basket near the wall. Picking up the paper, I saw that on it were written, in black ink, the letters:

Mr. Geo.

A glance into the basket showed me that on the bottom lay nearly two hun-

dred scraps of paper torn into varying sizes.

These I carefully removed and placed between the pages of a book which I took from one of the shelves of the book-case.

A search of the room for mucilage proved fruitless, so, carrying the book, I went down to the kitchen, where I might find an egg which would serve my purpose.

Having secured the white of an egg, I at once proceeded with the task of fitting the torn pieces of paper together in their proper positions, and then pasting them on sheets of legal which I had taken with me from the living-room.

I had been thus engaged for about fifteen minutes when I realized that I had made a discovery of the greatest importance.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD.

THE task that now confronted me was a difficult one. I saw that the slips constituted a letter that had been addressed to me, and which had been written closely on five sheets of letter paper. Fortunately the writer had written on only one side of each sheet.

Nearly three-quarters of an hour passed before the last slip was in its proper position.

I now had before me the most remarkable document on which it ever had fallen to my lot to gaze—a document which, doubtless, having been left on the living-room table, had been found, read, and destroyed by Cowden shortly before he had taken his life.

The letter was signed by Commander Baintree, and read as follows:

MR. GEORGE RIPLEY,
Secret-Service Agent.

MY DEAR SIR:—John Cowden, formerly an assistant keeper at the White Shoal lighthouse, yesterday brought out to me a despatch from Washington which informs me that I am about to be relieved of the charge of this lighthouse, and that you have been named as my successor.

I have prepared a report which I will forward to the lighthouse board to-mor-

row. Circumstances are such, however, that it will be impossible for me to await your arrival here. I will, therefore, make a brief report to you of the misfortunes that have befallen me. Owing to one of these misfortunes, I am unable to write this communication with my own hand, so I am dictating it to Mr. Wilson.

I have been informed that twice since my arrival on the shoal the light has been extinguished. I have no personal knowledge of such disappearances, however.

But this I do know—on each of these occasions neither Wilson nor myself was able to account for the mysterious loss of three hours. For this fact I am unable to offer any explanation—theoretical or otherwise.

On the subject of a third extinguishment of the light, however, I have something to say—something which, so far from enlightening you, must only serve to deepen the mystery.

But before I speak of this, which will give you much food for thought, I deem it my duty to cause you to be on your guard against a serious physical peril which now threatens you and your companions.

I refer to the presence in the tower of a large and singularly ferocious spider. I have seen it only once, and a careful search of the lighthouse, from lantern to coal-bin, has failed to reveal its lurking-place.

It was shortly after four o'clock yesterday afternoon that I saw the miserable insect. Having been on watch all the night before, I lay down on a cot in the sleeping-room, about one o'clock in the afternoon, and was soon asleep.

I was wearing only a short-sleeved undershirt and a pair of trousers at the time, and when I woke, a little after four, I was conscious of a tickling sensation just above the elbow of my left arm. Believing that this was caused by contact with the covering of the cot, I altered my position.

As I did so, a sharp pain of considerable severity darted through the arm, and, a moment later, I felt something drop lightly on my chest.

Raising my head quickly, I beheld an enormous spider, which was looking at me with a pair of glittering black eyes.

In a moment it had bounded from my body to the floor; then it disappeared at the head of the staircase which led to the room below. Seizing a broom which was leaning against the wall, I followed

the fleeing insect as quickly as I could, and, as I ran, I called to Wilson, who hurried down from the living-room.

Our search for the spider was in vain.

When Cowden arrived with the Washington despatches of which I have spoken, the wound I had received gave me great pain, and the arm was swelling rapidly. In a short time I was suffering from a fever.

Convinced that the spider belonged to a species of the tarantula, I proceeded to employ the same remedies that I once had found effective for the treatment of the bite of a rattlesnake. I cauterized the wound with a red-hot poker, applied a flaxseed poultice, and drank several copious drafts of whisky.

These remedies afforded me no relief, however, and for the last twelve hours my condition has been growing rapidly worse.

As I now prepare to describe to you the most singular of the adventures that have befallen me since my arrival on this mysterious shoal, I am almost on the verge of delirium as a result of my sufferings. Despite this fact, however, my recital of these incidents is not colored by any flight of a feverish fancy.

Cowden was landed on the shoal by a fishing vessel about six o'clock last evening. He entered the lighthouse alone, and, upon giving me the despatches, he received permission from me to pass the night on the shoal.

In view of my enfeebled condition, I was inclined to regard his arrival as distinctly providential.

Shortly after Cowden's arrival, the wind began to freshen, and by nine o'clock it had assumed the character of a gale.

The rising tide brought with it a heavy sea, and during the next four hours the lighthouse received a series of heavy buffeting.

The storm was at its height about eleven o'clock, when, lying on my cot, I turned to Cowden to ask him to renew my poultice. At this moment there came to our ears a strange, jangling, muffled sound that seemed to issue from one of the rooms above. It lasted for a couple of seconds, perhaps, then it ceased abruptly.

Cowden, starting violently, looked upward.

"What's that?" he muttered.

"Wilson probably has dropped something on the stone floor of the watch-room," I answered testily. "But get me the poultice."

Cowden, with a bewildered look on his face, turned slowly toward me. He was about to speak when there fairly quivered through the lighthouse two of the most awful, long-drawn shrieks I ever heard. Then I heard a woman's voice.

"Jack—Jack!" it cried. "In Heaven's name, Jack, put out the light and stop the bell!"

For the moment all my physical anguish was forgotten. Shaking with fright, I rose quickly to a sitting position on the cot. Never before had I seen on human features such an expression of overwhelming horror as I saw on Cowden's now.

Like me, the young man was trembling violently. Both of us were so dazed and terrified that we were unable to speak or move.

A heavy wave now smote the lighthouse with a force that made it tremble from top to bottom. Then I heard the woman's voice again. It came to us much fainter now, and seemed to throb with fear.

"The light, Jack—put out the light! The monster sees us, and is coming—coming! For Heaven's sake, put out the light, and stop the bell!"

Thrill after thrill passed through me as I leaped from the bed to the floor. Breathing heavily, and with his head thrust forward, Cowden rushed up the stairway. Moving weakly, I followed.

When I reached the living-room, I stopped and listened. At first all above me was still; then I heard the shuffling of feet.

I tried to call to Wilson, but my throat and lips were so parched that I was unable to utter a single syllable.

As I started to ascend the stairway leading to the watch-room, I saw that the watch-room light had been extinguished. Too feeble to proceed farther, I retreated to a chair in the living-room. On this I sank inertly, and waited. Then I suddenly realized that the fog-bell had ceased tolling, and that the lantern-light was out!

How long I sat there I do not know. At length, however, my pain became so agonizing that I fainted. When I came to myself, I was lying on my cot, and Wilson was bending over me. Daylight was streaming in through the window, and the waves had ceased to thunder.

Strangely enough, of the mysterious voice or of the extinguishment of the light and the silencing of the bell, Wilson appeared to know nothing.

He said that he and Cowden, hearing me moaning, had descended from the watch-room and found me lying on the floor beside a chair in the living-room.

Both of my companions professed to believe that I was the victim of an hallucination, due to my illness.

Cowden failed to conceal from me the fact that a deep impression had been made upon his mind by my recital, however.

Several times I saw a pallor overspread his face, and twice or thrice since then I have heard him muttering incoherently to himself.

This is all I have to tell you now.

A boat landed at the shoal this morning, and a young man brought to the lighthouse several letters addressed to us at the Charlesport post-office. Why he should have done this, I do not know, for the letters were quite unimportant, and the seas still were fairly heavy.

He made a search of the lighthouse for the miserable spider, but was unable to find it. He said his name was David Rensior. Wilson wanted me to go back with the fellow to Charlesport, in order to secure medical attention, but I foolishly declined to do so.

Since then I have regretted my decision, and, realizing that if my life is to be saved I must consult a physician at once, I am preparing to leave the shoal. It is possible that Wilson, who will accompany me, will be able to see you before you put off for the shore.

With best wishes for the success of your mission, I remain,

Yours very truly,

HENRY BAINTREE,
Commander, U. S. N.

Having carefully reread this astonishing letter, I raised the sheets and slipped them into one of the pockets of my coat.

That part of the letter which had to do with the tarantula and the effects of its bite would, if true, explain the departure of Baintree and Wilson from the tower.

But was it true? The rest of the letter—with its description of the cries of the mysterious woman, and its reference to the singular lapse of memory in the cases of Wilson and Cowden—obviously was so highly colored by an overworked imagination that I was inclined to doubt the truth of all.

Yet, as I reflected more carefully on the matter, the story concerning the

tarantula did not seem so improbable, after all. The great spider might have been taken into the lighthouse in a bunch of bananas, or have drifted to the shoal on some object that had been thrown overboard from a vessel bound northward from the tropics.

Moreover, the finding of the flaxseed poultice and the poker seemed to corroborate the writer's account of his sufferings.

It was also clear that I could not consistently regard as incredible Baintree's assertion that twice while the light had been extinguished he and Wilson were unable to account for all that had occurred during a period of three hours, for, did I not find myself in a similar predicament?

With regard to the account of the third extinguishment, however, it would have to be considered that the narrator was manifestly the victim of a fever that indicated the approach of delirium.

On this occasion it would appear that of the three men in the lighthouse Baintree was the only one who had been able to retain a recollection of the incidents attending the extinguishment of the light. Unless, however, one was prepared to recognize as a fact the presence in the lighthouse of some distinctively supernatural agency, or of a ventriloquist who was able to hypnotize the inmates for a period of three hours, no serious consideration could be given to Baintree's extraordinary assertions.

According to Baintree's account, the lights, both in the watch-room and the lantern, had been extinguished by Cowden himself. If this was true, the action must have taken place in the presence of Wilson; but from the lips of Wilson there appeared to have come no word of protestation.

I rose from the table at which I had been seated and was in the act of casting into a garbage receptacle all that remained of the white of the egg which had served me as paste, when a sharp, muffled sound, coming from one of the rooms above, chilled my blood and my heart seemed to cease its beating.

The sound, though louder, was similar to that which I had heard when Cowden had sent the fatal bullet into his brain!

Rushing to the stairway, I mounted it quickly.

Through the sleeping and diving rooms I made my way, with nervous, breathless haste. At last I reached the watch-room.

On the floor, with his head against the blanket-covered feet of the dead Cowden, lay Torrens—moving weakly, and with a still smoking revolver grasped tightly in his hand.

Overwhelmed by a conflict of the most powerful emotions that may come to any man, I recoiled from the sight that met my view. Then, with a feeble effort, the old keeper, struggling to a sitting position,

(To be continued.)

ture, began to raise the revolver to his head.

With a hoarse cry, I leaped toward him and seized his hands. In a moment I had secured possession of the weapon.

As I started to draw away, Torrens grasped my coat. I was about to glance at the old man's face when a sudden movement of that part of the blanket that lay over Cowden's head attracted and held my attention.

More and more violently it stirred, then from it rolled a blackish, palpitating thing, which, as it struck the floor, went skimming and bounding toward the stair.

It was the tarantula!

SHIRT ANNIE.

By Frank Condon.

HOW a lady of the flat-iron had thoughts about and words with a perfectly good nobleman.

"If it wasn't for the surprising things that are always happening, and if it wasn't for the novelty of the job and the constant need of the money, and if I had the knack and the love of loafing like some people," said Shirt Annie, mopping her tired face with her apron, "I'd certainly give up this job. Look at this, now."

Shirt Annie held up a white shirt, with purple stripes.

"Look!" she commanded, turning the shirt round. "What d'ye make of that?"

Mag and Lil examined the garment attentively.

It had come steaming and damp from the mangle, and Shirt Annie's narrow ironing-table was its next stop. After she had smoothed it out with the heavy iron, and stiffened its florid bosom with starch, it would be wrapped around a pasteboard that they use in laundries to simulate a man's spinal column, and the red-faced parcel-boy in front would tie it into a chaste bundle.

It would then be piled on the shelves with other bundles of fresh-laundried things, and eventually some male person would come along and clasp it to his bosom with a cheery smile.

"It's a kind of a nutty thing, ain't it?" mused Shirt Annie, holding the purple-striped shirt aloft.

"Very odd," admitted Mag. Mag was the mangler. "Very odd."

"Rather foreign, I should say," put in Lil. Lil ironed cuffs, socks, suspenders, ties, and miscellaneous apparel.

"Whose is it, d'ye know?" scratching the freshly ironed shirt with a pensive forefinger. "He ain't a big man, judging by the size. Number fourteen and a half neck. Albert's shirts is sixteen; and, you know, Lil, Albert ain't what you could really call a big man."

Lil took the shirt nearer the window and gazed with critical eye and pursed lip upon its royal chest.

It was one of those shirts invented by a nameless fiend during the Spanish Inquisition to torture men before the hot-iron and eye-gouging ceremonials. It split down the back, and it split down the front. It was the kind of shirt that a man gets into by lying on the floor and sneaking the collar-buttons into their buttonholes before the wretched thing

can bisect itself and flop apart like a split shad.

In front and on either side of the dividing line were two designs stamped into the material. They were similar, and were so placed in order to be visible after the collar and cravat were put on. The twin design was a brilliant green oval containing a golden fleece.

"It looks something like a worm in a nut," commented Mag interestedly.

"You're a nut," answered Shirt Annie tartly. "That gold thing is a fleece. Don't you know a fleece when you see it?"

Mag retired to her mangle and Lil to her table, and Shirt Annie resumed the difficult duties that gave her a name in the parlance of laundries. She hummed softly during the afternoon, and never once did the thoughtful frown leave her perspiring forehead.

"Now, *where* did I see that thing before?" she argued. "I bet you I've seen that. I know I saw it on some shirts last week, but I know I saw it somewhere else, and I'm trying to think, and for the life of me I can't recall it; and why is it, when you're thinking your hardest— By gee, now I know!"

Shirt Annie dropped her iron so suddenly that it fell to the floor, and missed the off toe on her left foot by a flea's whisper. She pounced upon the silent shirt, and stared at the device.

"As sure as I'm Irish, it's the same thing. Ain't that funny! To think of him having his shirts done up here. Why, she lives somewhere round here, too. That's awful funny. I think I'll tell the girls. No, I won't. I'm going to just keep this to myself, and—well, if that ain't funny!"

When, in the course of human events, an English earldom begins to run for Sweeny, and the instalment-houses are sending up insulting letters every Monday; and when the senior earl can't lend the junior earl the family watch to hock because it's in hock already; and when the hunting-pack slims down to one brunette dog, and that an iron dog in the front yard; and when the butler has butted along for seven or eight years, and quits suddenly over night, taking away the dining-room rug in part payment of cash arrears due and not paid; and when

the proud name that has flickered down through the ages from the time William the Conqueror put the bee on old England, and is about to appear as the caudal-appendage on a position-wanted ad in the *London Times*—it behooves somebody round the place to put on his behoovers and start something that will eventually produce cash, lots of cash, warm, trickling, and ready to spend.

This particular earldom was set down in a valley about nine hours out of London, and it smelled of hyacinths and motor-cars. It had a name that took up four lines of pica type in *Burke's Peerage*, including two hyphens.

The principal son and heir, which would naturally be his young earlets, was Potheringham Orby Guensinborough Smolley, and his calling-cards folded on a perforation to get it all in. Young Orby—his friends called him Orby—always lived in London, because he liked steam heat, and his respected sire wouldn't be in the way of perpetually borrowing a two-dollar bill from him.

When he suddenly received a serious communication from the old gentleman, calling his attention to the devastated condition of the family check-book, he was "peevish," not to say irritated.

You are probably wondering what this credit man's survey of an English noble's home has to do with Shirt Annie and the laundry up on Sixty-Sixth Street, New York. We're all that way. Nobody can wait these days.

Young Orby went down to Worcestershire on a fast express, talked the matter over with his male parent, and telegraphed for a ticket to America. In eighteen hours he was kissing everybody good-by and riding down to the station in the family's last dog-cart, wondering which old friend of his could introduce him to an American millionaire's only daughter, because he wanted to marry her and annex the needed tauzoids. That's how the thing starts to hook up with Shirt Annie.

Leave it to the Sunday papers, particularly the parts that are printed in red, green, and blue, with dragons all round the margins, and mosquitoes the size of an ox shooting their cruel stems into a child's arm.

They heard about Lord Orby, or Earl

Orby. Some of them called him Count Orby, in spite of the fact that there are no counts in England, unless they sneak in late at night. It took the astute London correspondents just twelve hours to fathom the whole mystery of why Earl Orby sailed for New York. They knew he couldn't sail across the Thames River, if he had to finance the expedition unaided, and they decided that some worthy object in his exploration had induced the pawnbrokers to unclasp some more gold.

The papers were full of it. In New York the Sunday supplements went into the matter thoroughly. They printed photographs of the young earl shooting elephants from a balloon, riding to hounds in a pearl-gray necktie, fighting a duel at eighty paces with a dachshund-revolver, and rowing with the Oxford crew.

They gave detailed measurements, showing his chest expansion, the diameter of his left leg, the height he would have been if he had been born a Chinaman, and the type of paper-cutter he used.

Then they published the pictures of the ancestral domains, and figured that if stood on end they would be higher than the Singer Building and the Metropolitan Tower combined. All investigations ended with the announcement that Earl Orby was coming over to wed an American heiress.

They gave the name of the heiress, and in this respect each paper assumed a different policy, and stuck to it with that intense loyalty that marks our American journalism. The system followed by New York papers in such cases is to select a name from a list of unmarried American women, and hang onto it until the day before the wedding. If they guess right, nobody cares. If they don't, ditto.

And never did the Sunday papers print that story without showing in colors the family arms of the Earl Smolley, which happened to be a golden fleece within a green oval.

Shirt Annie read the Sunday papers immediately after helping her mother with the breakfast dishes. When she first saw the pictures of that defunct British possession, she decided to read the story every Sunday it came out, and and follow it until Earl Orby fought his

way into the church with his blushing bride through a mob of wild-eyed American women sightseers, who don't care a snap for nobility or royalty.

Naturally she noticed the crest. 'Twas a striking thing, stowed up there in the corner of the page, directly above the picture of the earl killing a python with a walking-stick.

You can see why Shirt Annie gasped with maidenly astonishment when she suddenly recollected in the laundry that warm afternoon that the crest on the purple-striped shirt was nothing else than the royal arms of Earl Potheringham Orby Guensinborough Smolley.

Here was romance for you! Here was coincidence. In the laundry that afternoon the boss spoke sharply to Shirt Annie several times, all because the latter's mind was running on the earl, and simply wouldn't get down to the business of massaging the wrinkles out of men's corsages.

But the next day!

Words are but puerile things to describe what happened the next day. While the golden fleece within the green oval excited mild curiosity, the card that fell out of a lady's silken thingumajig, on the table across from Shirt Annie, started a mental disturbance that assumed typhonic proportions, and nobody in that blessed laundry shared the excitement except Shirt Annie.

"What's this card doing here?" asked little Miss Kane, holding it up between moist fingers.

"Whose is it?" queried Shirt Annie absently.

"It says Maud Livingstone Mulreavy on it," answered Miss Kane, tossing the pasteboard bit across the room.

"Must be Maud's, then," said Shirt Annie, picking it up.

She looked at it once, and in a flash she remembered the name. It was the card of the Maud Livingstone Mulreavy. Five newspapers had united upon Maud as the American millionairess destined to become the bride of Earl Orby. Shirt Annie was dumfounded, stricken speechless.

She turned the white card over and over in her hand. What had been coincidence before now became miracle. It was a shock to find oneself laundering

the shirts of Earl Orby, but to know that the girl beside one was doing up things for Maud Livingstone Mulreavy made reason to sway on her throne.

After that Shirt Annie worked in a trance. Pleated shirts were scorched, and attached cuffs frayed under her merciless iron. Too much romance suddenly deposited upon the unsuspecting head of a laundry-girl simply tears her mental processes wide open, and woe unto the luckless garments of men that come her way.

In Sheridan's Laundry—it was Sheridan's, though no mention has been made thus far because of the advertising feature of the information—the cashier was an angular woman of thirty-six years, who hated rats—wire spring or natural hair—and who consequently wore her decimated locks in a neat and compact knot on the starboard bow of her serious head. She didn't particularly hate Shirt Annie; so she delivered to her the information that the owner of the shirts with the golden fleece and the green oval was a tallish young man, who looked like a foreigner, and who wore a very large seal-ring on the third finger of his left hand.

Shirt Annie couldn't remember reading about the seal-ring in the Sunday papers, but she attributed it to an oversight on the part of the editors. She began to watch the front door.

He came in Tuesday morning at nine forty-three o'clock, smoking a cork-tipped cigarette.

Shirt Annie received a brief wireless from the cashier which read: "Here he is. How do you like him?"

He was rather a disappointment. The earl looked like an American citizen working somewhere on Duane Street, probably in the shoe business, who had obviously neglected to shave. His clothes fitted him neatly, as clothes fit all American men. He had a short mustache, that corresponded with the one in the pictures, and that's about as far as Shirt Annie could trace a resemblance. Any one who knows anything about newspaper photography will understand this.

In the excitement of the moment Shirt Annie burned her hand, and emitted a feminine yowl of pain, whereat the earl looked at her with interest. In fact, he

stared, and although Sheridan's was somewhat dimly lighted, he saw that she was distinctly pretty.

Several times after that Shirt Annie saw the earl, and each time he cast an approving eye upon her. Once, it was on the street, as the girl was hurrying along to the shop. She knew that he was watching, but she modestly kept her eyes upon the ground and scurried along. He certainly knew how to dress, thought Shirt Annie, and he had an air about him.

Lucky Maud Livingstone! She wondered what the palace in England looked like.

Some of the cars on Columbus Avenue run on a schedule, and some of them run by whim. Shirt Annie was waiting for one of the latter, when a man's walking-stick dropped with a metallic thud beside her, and a voice said:

"I beg your pardon, miss."

Young men who have lived in New York will recognize this five-word sentence. It does yeoman duty day and night. Young ladies will know it, too, and if they blush it is because of memories.

Shirt Annie turned, and there beside her, hat in hand, stood Earl Potheringham Orby Guensinborough Smolley. She stared at him silently, and slightly frightened.

He was speaking to her hurriedly, and somewhat lamely, if she could have heard; but she couldn't hear, because her eyes were fastened upon a golden fleece within a green oval directly underneath his collar, on the white shirt with the purple stripes, the shirt which her own hands had made immaculate.

"I'm awfully sorry to speak to you without an introduction," the earl was saying; "but I've noticed you frequently of late. In fact, I've seen you so often that it seems I almost know you. I know it's forward on my part, but I've been simply longing to meet you, and I'm driven to this informal way because I can't think of any other. You'll forgive me, won't you?"

The earl put as much pathos into the latter portion of his remark as any one could desire.

At first Shirt Annie was flustered. Then she thought of the quality of the

man who was talking. What kind of a country was England? Did the men over there think they could land upon our hospitable shores and address themselves without an introduction to every girl who by chance happened to pass their way?

Just because he was an earl, did this man think he had special license? What would the proud nobility of England think of such behavior. What would Maud Livingstone Mulreavy, the bride-to-be, think if she should hear that her fiancé was gadding about upper New York speaking to laundry-girls?

At the thought of Maud, Shirt Annie smiled. The earl smiled, too. He saw his work smoothing out before him. Shirt Annie reached down and snapped open her eight-inch crocodile purse, and drew from it a small piece of pasteboard with printing on it.

She looked the earl directly in the eye as she handed him the card, and waited for him to quail.

"Perhaps you recognize me," she said, trying to talk icily.

Shirt Annie had read that young ladies always speak icily when addressed by strangers.

The earl read the card without emotion.

"It's a pretty name—almost as pretty as its owner. But what a long one. Now, I should like Maud Mulreavy just by itself. I never did like three names for a girl. Where did you get the Livingstone part, and who made you put it in?"

Shirt Annie looked at the earl in amazement. She started to speak, but words failed her. The earl remained silent, holding the card daintily between his fingers and smiling at her cheerfully.

"Don't you recognize that name?" she finally said, with a painful effort at self-control. "Don't you know Maud Livingstone Mulreavy?"

"If I do," said the earl, "I hope to die. You aren't a chorus-girl at night, are you?"

Shirt Annie stared at him stupidly. From his smiling countenance her gaze descended to his necktie, and rested upon the golden fleece within the green oval.

"What's wrong with my tie?" he asked, following her glance.

"Nothing. Aren't you Earl Orby—Earl Potheringham Orby Guensinborough Smolley?"

"Come again, please?"

"Aren't you the earl? Aren't you going to marry Miss Mulreavy?"

"I think some one is kidding me," said the young man; "and, if it's a joke, why send over my end so I can laugh, too. But, if you really want to know, I'm not the Earl Smothingham Schootzenborough Gazooks, or any other earl; nor am I King Alfonso, nor the King of Prussia, nor Carrie Nation, Outlaw Tracy, nor Christy Mathewson, of the New York Giants.

"I'm plain Mister John B. Forbes, of One Hundred and Forty-Fifth Street, New York City, free and untrammelled; here for the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness till death do us part. Now, come on, young lady, quick, with the answer."

Shirt Annie still kept her eyes upon the insignia of rank that snuggled on either side of the young man's cravat.

"You wear the arms of the earl," she said. "Where did you get them?"

"Arms?"

"This."

Shirt Annie poked a stiffened finger at the brilliant green oval and the golden fleece.

"Oh, that! You don't mean to say—well, I'll be jiggered! Say, do you mean to say that you've doped it out? You saw it in the laundry, didn't you? Well, I'll be jiggered!"

"Where did you get it?" went on Shirt Annie mercilessly.

"Little girl," said the young man, "I work for a cigarette company, with eighteen hundred stores in America. Every employee is loyal. At present I'm one of their employees.

"Every employee manifests his loyalty by wearing the trade-mark of the company on some part of his anatomy. Instead of being branded with it, I wear it on my shirt.

"This," laying his finger on the green oval and the golden fleece, "is the trade-mark of the Smith Cigarette Company, and I'm the clerk of the Forty-Eighth Street store.

"You take this car, don't you? I thought so. I'll see you home."

HELEN OF TROUBLES.*

By Meyram Hill.

Dealing with several of the many things a youth will do for a lady in vicissitudes, especially if he has a nose for news.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

IN the very early morning Marjory Roland leans out of her motor-car and asks Barry Ellison, correspondent, to aid her. Being adventurous, the young man consents, and is taken by a roundabout route to a country-house, where he is told he must impersonate one Jack Rutherford, and patch up a quarrel with the latter's sick uncle, Benjamin Gordon. Barry's suspicions are roused by their stealthy approach to the house, also by voices heard in the dark. A dwarfish person, Mr. Hardston, a lawyer, supposedly the employer of Miss Roland, leads him to Gordon's bedroom, where the sick man asks him unintelligible questions. Later, Barry, having been drugged, wards off sleep long enough to give to another strange girl, Helen Gordon, a paper her uncle has given him. Next day, realizing that he has been in a house divided against itself, he is about to let the matter drop, when he receives a telephone message asking him to go to Poe's Park at eleven o'clock in the evening.

CHAPTER XII.

POE'S PARK.

A FEW inquiries as to the location of Poe's Park gave Barry his directions, and a little before ten o'clock he set out.

He was absolutely in the dark as to whom he was to meet, but with considerable anticipation he took the train for Fordham. He knew that a woman's voice had spoken to him over the telephone, and he knew the coming meeting must be a continuation of the previous night's adventure.

He had wondered if it could have been Marjory Roland who had called him up, but had decided that it was not she with whom he had spoken over the telephone. He hardly knew Helen Gordon's voice well enough to be sure that it was not hers, and yet he had missed the soft plaintiveness in the tone.

"Whatever it is, it promises some new development," he commented as he turned up the hill from the station. In a few blocks the populated door-steps were left behind, and in a few more he was traveling a rather poorly lighted road.

Single detached houses lined the right side of the street, and as he gained the top of the hill he made out, close to one of them, a little white cottage. On the tin sign, tacked high under the gable, was the melancholy outline of a raven.

The corner of Barry's mouth went up in a smile. For an instant he surveyed the little building where real tales, full of the weird, had found birth. Then, turning about, he noted the small patch of ground across the street, which bore the name of the dead poet.

"A very fine place to go on with the adventure," he remarked to the silent cottage, glancing over his shoulder, "If by chance your astral body, Edgar Allan, is hovering round, you can add fuel to the fire. And, by the bye, you might. It is a fair beginning."

He moved across the street.

"It has interest in the running—to date. By all rights, it should go on; but, please, if the gods be willing, toss in a little daylight, and let me have a peep at the trail."

Selecting the darkest spot he could find, he threw himself on the ground. It was still a little before the appointed hour, and he was prepared to wait.

*Began June All-Story Magazine. Single copies, 10 cents.

Eleven o'clock came and went, and he sat up, cross-legged, on the turf. No one had passed, save a mounted policeman, and the impression gradually began to form itself in his mind that some one had played a practical joke on him.

He had not, however, mentioned his previous night's experience to any one. It was hardly possible that Davis or Sutton had gathered enough, from what he had said to them, to think they saw an opportunity of amusing themselves at his expense. He was getting a bit provoked at being kept waiting so long.

At half past eleven he rose and stretched himself, ready to believe that he had made the trip for nothing. As he crossed the park he saw a figure coming down the road. He stepped into the shadow of a tree and waited.

On came the figure, and, as recognition came to Barry, his heart leaped with pleasure. He had not counted on it being Helen Gordon who had called him up.

Crossing the grass quickly, he met her in the middle of the street.

"So it was you," he said.

She glanced up at him, a faint, timid smile upon her lips. Her large dark eyes shone.

"Yes," she faltered, while her lips parted and the smile on them grew. "I am late, I know, but I couldn't help it."

It was very evident to Barry that she was laboring under a good deal of excitement, so he shifted his eyes from her face.

"It's not so very late," he answered. "I suppose"—he turned and smiled at her—"you want to ask me a few questions. The best place round here is one of those benches. Shall we sit down?"

"If you do not mind."

They moved across to the park and sat down in silence. Barry leaned forward, elbow on knee, and began poking the gravel with his foot. He felt a bit embarrassed, and was a little at a loss how to begin the conversation. Before he could speak, the girl turned toward him.

"I don't know, Mr. Ellison, just how to begin."

Barry looked at his companion and smiled whimsically.

"Those are just the words Miss Roland used," he said.

The girl drew back sharply and sat straight and rigid, her eyes fixed in a searching look on Barry's face. Her expression suddenly became one of distrust.

"I guess, perhaps," Barry hastened, "if you don't mind, I will explain a little first. I didn't get much of a chance last night; now, did I?"

"No, you did not," the girl agreed. "That is why I called you up and asked you to meet me here. I felt I *must* talk with you."

"Yes, I was pretty badly off last night," Barry went on, his eyes shifting to the ground; "I really am not sure what I said or did. At the time I think I knew—but it is hard to remember."

"I tried to rouse you. I shook you and pulled you up onto the sofa, but you would not wake. Then I heard a noise at the door, and I slipped out onto the balcony."

"I see," Barry agreed; "and did any one come into the room?"

"Yes. I watched. At first I thought I would wait; but if I had, they would have known how I got out of my room. And then I thought I could do no good. I watched from the balcony. If they had been intending you any harm, I would have called out."

He looked at his companion.

"That was very good of you."

"I do not think so; you should not feel so. Now, I think I would have called out; but, really, I waited to see whether I could find out anything about you. I wanted to place you—to learn, if I could, who you were and why you came to the house. From what you said to me, I thought perhaps you did not know Miss Roland or Mr. Hardston very well. You spoke as if you would be willing to help."

"To be sure." Barry nodded as the other stopped her half-timid, half-excited explanation. "And what did you find out?"

"Not very much." She shook her head. "I saw Mr. Hardston and Miss Roland come into the room. They didn't seem surprised to find you asleep."

"I judge not," Barry agreed dryly.

"What I did see made me think I had understood you correctly—that you were not in league with them."

"So you decided to call me up and find out what I had done?"

"I thought I could do that. It seemed the only thing for me to do, if I was to find out anything."

"To be sure. But what did Mr. Hardston and Miss Roland do?"

"They searched your pockets for something, and, when they failed to find it, Mr. Hardston stormed up and down the room. Oh, he is terrible, when he flies into a rage!" The girl shuddered.

"Then Miss Roland got angry with him, as she does sometimes. I heard her tell him he must have been mistaken about something. That was after they had looked through all your pockets."

"That is just about what I thought had happened." Barry nodded. "You see, they were after that paper I gave you. In some way, they must have seen Mr. Gordon hand it to me. Perhaps Hardston slipped into the room and was behind the screen."

He looked at Helen Gordon inquiringly.

She shook her head.

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"Well, they knew, in some way, that I had that paper. It was lucky you came along just as you did, and I gave it to you."

"You saw my uncle?" the girl questioned.

"To be sure I did. You don't know, after all, what I did, or how I came into the affair, except what I told you last night?"

"And that was very vague," the girl answered.

"I have no doubt it was," Barry agreed with a wry smile. "Well, to begin with—but, then, perhaps you want to ask me some questions. Just go ahead and ask whatever you wish. I'll give you all the information I can."

"I hardly know what to ask," Helen said, speaking slowly, while a frown gathered on her forehead. "I know so little myself. I have no chance to talk with my uncle, and he has never told me anything. I thought about you all day, and it just seemed to me that I must see you, and find out what you knew."

"So I asked you to meet me here. I got hold of the telephone for a minute

while Mr. Hardston and Miss Roland were out in the garden. Then I had to wait until it was dark and every one was asleep. They watch me so. If I hadn't found that the trellis outside my window was strong enough to bear my weight, I couldn't get out at all. They keep the house locked, and alarms on all the lower windows."

Barry pursed up his lips.

"We both seem to be very much in the dark," he began. "I know nothing at all. I am a newspaper man, Miss Gordon. I reached New York yesterday. Last night my adventures began."

And he told the girl his story.

Her occasional interjections made it clear that the trip in the motor-car had been purposely roundabout and misleading, and started a new train of suspicion in regard to whether Benjamin Gordon's illness was from natural or artificial causes.

After he had finished, the girl looked away and was silent for a long time. Barry waited patiently for her to speak. In the position in which they sat her profile stood out against the dim light of the distant street-lamp, even as it had been marked by the early dawn, when he had first seen her, on the balcony.

Her presence increased the spark of interest that had first flamed up within him, when he heard her voice in the garden.

He was really no nearer a solution of the puzzle. Their conversation had added no great amount of information, but he was more certain than ever that he wanted to help the girl.

After a little while she spoke.

"Can it be that my uncle has become distrustful of Mr. Hardston? I never heard him say anything against him; but then, I do not think he would to me, for he knows that I never liked him. Do you think he could have asked my cousin to find out something, which would either confirm or disprove his doubt?"

"He had, beyond a question, asked your cousin to look up some one for him. Who that some one is, I do not know." While Barry was quite ready to agree with his companion that it was Hardston of whom Benjamin Gordon was suspicious, he did not feel that he should allow his personal prejudice

against the little lawyer to govern his opinion.

"It must have something to do with the invention my uncle has worked on so long," Helen suggested wearily.

"Your cousin would know," Barry put in.

"If I could find my cousin. I have wanted to see him, but have had no chance since we went to Mr. Hardston's. While we were in town it was not so bad, but during the last three months it has become unbearable. I have no one upon whom I can depend—except my cousin. And he—"

She stopped and glanced doubtfully at Barry.

"Let me find your cousin for you. I can get hold of him in some way, and arrange for you to see him. When he knows that you want him, he will come to you quickly."

"Will he?" Helen Gordon's voice suddenly rang with scorn, and Barry thought of what she had said to him the night before, when she had taken him for Rutherford. "I do not think he would even trouble himself."

"But you say you want to see him?" Barry questioned.

"Because there is no one else. I do not know what he could do, or whether he would be willing to help us at all. Perhaps I am letting my dislikes sway my feelings. There is, I fear, nothing to do but await my uncle's recovery. We may go back home then."

"There is no one else to whom you could appeal?" Barry asked.

"No one. I have always lived with my uncle, except when I was at college."

"There is the paper," Barry suggested, "which your uncle gave me. That should be given to your cousin, should it not? It said something about his destroying a package."

"Yes," her voice had grown lifeless as well as tired; "I suppose it should." She rose slowly.

"I will have to find him in some way and give it to him. Then I can ask him if he will not take us away. I could go, of course, but I must not leave my uncle."

Barry rose slowly and stood, looking down on his companion.

"Won't you let me look up your

cousin for you? I have come into this thing in an odd way, but perhaps that was intended."

"Intended?" Helen Gordon questioned in doubt.

"By Fate," Barry smiled.

The girl laughed and turned along the path.

"Let us walk a way. I can think better, perhaps."

They crossed the park and turned down the road in the direction from which she had come. After a little while Barry glanced at her.

"Don't feel that I am too persistent, or that I want to meddle, but I should like to help you, if I may. I could find your cousin and tell him what I have done—I feel that I should do that—and then arrange to have him meet you."

"I don't want to bother you, Mr. Ellison. And I do not—please don't misunderstand me—want to bring a stranger into my uncle's affairs, when, perhaps, I should not do so. I hope you will understand?"

"I do, Miss Gordon. Yet, I do feel that I should find your cousin and tell him what I have done. Don't let the point of bothering me make you hesitate. I am naturally a bit interested, having some curiosity; but, more than that, I want to help you."

"Help me—why?"

"Because I think I should. I have helped one side in this matter. Let me be of some service to the other—yourself—and thus offset what harm, if any, I have done."

"It is very good of you to offer."

"It would be very good of you to let me do something."

"I have no one," the girl spoke more to herself than to Barry. "I do not really see what harm it could do."

"It could do no harm at all," Barry put in. "I will find your cousin and just arrange for him to meet you. You can talk with him and give him that bit of paper. I will, of course, drop out when you desire it; and, if it is necessary to add, forget whatever I have learned."

The girl did not answer for some time. At last she turned to Barry and inclined her head.

"I will accept your very kind offer,

Mr. Ellison, for I feel that I must see my cousin, though I fear that it will do no good."

"It can do no harm."

"No, but you will have a hard time finding him. I do not know his address."

"I will get track of him just the same. Oh, yes; tell me what are his habits—that will help."

"Really, Mr. Ellison—" the girl stopped. The look on her face was one that indicated her displeasure at the question.

"The reason I ask is that I saw a man who looked a little like me to-day. Now, to be frank with you, Miss Gordon, he was with an individual who was pointed out to me as a gambler. That is why I asked the question."

"I think that was the reason why my uncle and cousin quarreled. Sometimes Mr. Rutherford has gambled. I heard my uncle say so."

"And a description, if you can give it," he added.

The girl turned and looked Barry over very carefully. "I do not think you look very much like him. My cousin is as tall as you, and yet his face is heavier. He has dark hair, while yours—"

"Is red," Barry laughed. "It shows my Irish ancestry."

For the first time since they had met Helen Gordon broke into a light laugh. It sounded far better to Barry than the serious mood.

"Mr. Rutherford has a scar close to his right eye. It is a little one, crescent-shaped."

"I'll find him with that information," Barry said. "And when I do, what shall I say to him?"

"Tell him that I have a paper from my uncle for him, and that I must see him."

"And how shall I explain my connection in the matter?"

The girl considered for a moment. "Would you mind just saying you were an old friend; that you had known me in the West? That may not be the best thing to do, but I cannot think of anything else now."

"An old friend," Barry smiled. "I will tell him that."

"But how am I to see him?" the girl suddenly demanded, turning on Barry.

"I'll arrange for him to meet you anywhere you say."

Helen shook her head. "I do not know what to do about that. I want to see him somewhere, where Miss Roland would not be around."

"Do you ever come to town?" Barry questioned.

The inquiry brought a bitter laugh to Helen Gordon's lips. Barry looked at her in surprise.

"When I go to town, Miss Roland goes along. They seem afraid to let me out of their sight. I really think they want to keep me and my cousin apart."

"All the more need for your meeting him."

"But I do not see how."

"I think I can find your cousin to-night. I have a feeling that the man I saw to-day is Mr. Rutherford, and, if it turns out that he is, I will see him before morning."

"If I could see you then, to-morrow?"

"You say Miss Roland would come to town with you?"

"If I should say that I was going shopping she would announce that she had planned to go, and that I could go with her in the car."

"Tell her you do not care to do so."

"Then she or Mr. Hardston would say that they must speak to Mr. Gordon. When we first came to New York, my uncle made me promise not to go out without Miss Roland. He has strange ideas about a large city; really, he treats me like a child. I put up with everything rather than have him worried while he is ill."

"I tell you what you do," Barry put in quickly. "Come in to-morrow with Miss Roland, and when you are in some large store slip away from her. I will meet you somewhere and let you know whether I have found your cousin or not."

"Oh, I should like to!" the girl cried eagerly, and Barry felt that she had shown him more of her real self in that one speech than in the whole conversation they had had. "I should just like to give her the slip and let her worry a little."

"We can do it," Barry went on. "You go to some store where there is sure to be a crowd. I'll be there, and when you get into the crowd about a counter, I will step up and speak to Miss Roland. She will, I dare say, be a bit surprised to see me, and, while she is recovering, you can slip out the side door. Take Amberg's, on Twenty-First Street. When you go out, walk across to Fifth Avenue, and I will meet you there as soon as I can get away from Miss Roland. It won't take me long."

The girl clapped her hands in delight. "That is fine. It will work nicely. I will be there about twelve o'clock."

"And I will, I trust, have some news of your cousin. I will try and arrange to have you meet him that afternoon."

"You do rush things through!" Helen exclaimed with a smile.

She had stopped, and now held out her hand.

"I turn off here and go through this wood-path. It is all very kind of you, Mr. Ellison. I do not know how I can thank you."

"Don't try," Barry laughed; "you are giving me a great deal of pleasure, I assure you. But let me go with you to the house."

The girl shook her head.

"Michael is waiting for me down the path. Good-by until to-morrow."

Barry took the little hand held out to him.

"Good-by," he said with a rare smile. "We will have the whole matter straightened out in a day."

"I feel as if we might—with your help." She looked into his eyes for just a moment, and turned down the path.

For a long time Barry stood silently regarding the spot where she had disappeared.

CHAPTER XIII.

THROUGH GUARDED WAYS.

FINALLY he turned, and, with his hands thrust deep down into his pockets, moved slowly back along the road. By the time he had passed Poe's Park and bestowed an amused smile upon the white cottage across the way, he had nodded twice at nothing, apparently.

It was very evident that he was amused; but it was an amusement touched with real pleasure, and coupled to it was a feeling of deep interest and sympathy.

At a corner store he found a telephone, and, after calling a couple of numbers, got in touch with Sam Herrick.

Asking his friend to meet him at his hotel in half an hour, Barry boarded the Elevated and was on his way back down-town. Curled up in a corner seat he fell to a renewed consideration of the whole affair.

He did not feel that he had gained a great deal of information from his talk with Helen Gordon, but he did know on which side his full sympathies were enlisted. He even began to feel a little jealous of Rutherford.

When he found that individual, as he had no doubt he would, he supposed that he would have to drop out of the affair, once and for all. He could hardly see what further need there would be for him with Rutherford ready to help. That part of the matter he did not like in the least.

He got down at Twenty-Third Street and hurried across town. Herrick was waiting for him in the hotel lobby.

"Well," his friend demanded, "what's up? Your voice sounded over the phone as if the affairs of nations depended upon my meeting you."

Herrick was a little overlarge—in fact, rather fat—and his huge frame shook when he chuckled.

"Hope I didn't put you out by my summons. It is a bit important, to my way o' thinking." Barry lowered his voice. "Do you remember the woman you pointed out to me at luncheon—Lee Larson?"

"Sure." Herrick's small eyes narrowed and he continued to laugh softly.

"Do you happen to know where her establishment is?" Barry questioned.

"Did you keep me from going home just because you wanted to take a fling at the wheel? Nice reason."

"There is a man who may be playing there to-night. I just want to see if he has a scar on his face," Barry answered carelessly.

Herrick stopped chuckling.

"Oh! Scar—identification. Yes, I know the way in. Want to go?"

"Now, what the dickens do you suppose I'm asking questions for?" Barry demanded with a laugh as he turned away. "Come on."

The two climbed into a taxicab, and Herrick gave the driver his directions.

"What's up, Barry?" the older man questioned as the cab started down-town.

"I want to find this man, the one with the scar. I have an idea that we saw him with Lee Larson to-day."

"The fellow you thought looked like you?" Herrick questioned.

"That's the one. If he has the scar on his face, he must be the man I am after. A friend of mine—an old friend from the West"—Barry laughed—"is anxious to have him looked up. If I am right, I thought we might catch him at Larson's—wooin' Dame Fortune."

When the car came to a pause by the Post-Office Building the two men got off.

"We walk the rest of the way," Herrick suggested, turning down Broadway.

Barry glanced about him as his friend led the way down a street to the left. The sidewalks were practically deserted, and the two moved along side by side at a brisk pace.

"I want to get my directions," Barry suggested, coming to a pause as they made another turn around a corner. "I might want to come here again."

"Lots of good it would do you," Herrick laughed. "You couldn't get in."

"Then you can introduce me to some one when we do get in, so that I can have *entrée* hereafter."

Herrick chuckled again.

"I guess your man with a scar is a fake. Did you acquire the gambling habit while abroad?"

"Poker—good American poker," Barry answered. "I have limits—at least, my pocketbook has."

They moved along a dark street toward the East River, but finally made another turn—to the right this time—and Herrick stopped.

"Do you see that old hotel?" he questioned, pointing across the street. "That is the front door."

"It doesn't look very promising," was Barry's only comment as they crossed toward it.

Mounting the half-dozen steps that led up from the sidewalk and pushing aside heavy doors, they stood in a small, square hallway. There was a door across from the entrance; on the right was a small opening in the wall, which had evidently at one time served as the office; but had, since the days when the building was used as a hotel, been partly boarded up.

As they paused an instant a head appeared at the opening on the right, and two sharp eyes regarded them closely. Herrick made a sign, the head nodded, and instantly disappeared. The two went in.

Herrick pushed open the door on the opposite side of the lobby. A narrow hall, that seemed to have no end, led away into the semidarkness. Down it they walked. The way twisted and turned; two more doors were passed; a short flight of steps mounted.

"It's a regular labyrinth," Barry muttered.

Herrick laughed back over his shoulder and pushed open the third door. They entered a fairly large, well-lighted room. Across one end stretched a long bar, with stained mirrors behind it.

A man of huge frame leaned upon it, and, as they came forward, he regarded them silently. His costume was the conventional garb of a bartender. His face was heavy and dark, his hands tremendously large and powerful.

Herrick nodded.

"Guess we will have a winged cock-tail, Joe," he suggested. "Might serve it in the clouds."

The countenance of the man changed instantly. His little narrow slits of eyes narrowed still more—but with a smile—and his black-cropped head nodded agreement.

"Winged, to be sure, sir," he assented in a deep bass voice. "Pick out the ingredients yourselves, gentlemen."

Herrick turned to look at his friend, expecting to note some expression of surprise at the mention of such a drink. But Barry was waiting patiently, and the look on his face was as though the conversation was the most ordinary in the world.

Herrick turned back to the man.

"Guess we will, Joe. We'll look the

five barrels over twice, and sound each one six times. Rub-a-dub-dub! Five—two—six—three. Crisscross in a circle."

Instantly the man dived down behind the bar, and Barry followed Herrick around the end.

The bartender had straightened, and his hands began to touch the beer-cocks. The faint buzz of an electric-bell sounded across the room. The fifth beer-cock was touched—Barry was watching the man's movements with far more interest than his face indicated—then the second, next the sixth, and finally the third. Then Herrick stepped forward and began pressing first one, then another, of a row of buttons on the top of the bar.

When he stepped back they all three waited until the electric-buzzer sounded again. Then Joe stooped down, and with a push shoved three heavy boxes that were under the bar to one side. Straightening, he touched a button on the wall. Again the buzzer sounded, and with a faint click the floor under the bar where the three boxes had stood slid back. Turning, Joe touched an electric-switch, and the opening was flooded with light from below.

A flight of stairs led down, and, with a "Pleasant evening and good luck, gentlemen!" from Joe, the two descended. As they reached the bottom the floor over their heads slid back into place.

"A very nice arrangement," Barry suggested as they reached the bottom of the stairs.

"And we must go on," Herrick added. "No one ever comes out this way. You can get in, if you know the code; but you can't get out."

"'Can't get out' sounds ominous," Barry laughed.

"There is another way, of course."

"I trust so."

A long hall was before them, and they walked along side by side.

"Like Alice in Wonderland," Barry mused. "We should find a very beautiful garden at the end."

"It's beautiful enough," Herrick chuckled. "And it ought to be, considering what is dropped in here every night."

At the end of the hall was a heavy door, upon which they knocked. Instantly a panel in the upper part slid

back, and Herrick stepped to the opening. For a minute or two he held conversation with the attendant on the other side.

Finally he turned and beckoned to Barry.

"Put your face up to the opening," he said. "They want to have a look at you."

Barry did as he was directed and received the careful scrutiny of the man on the opposite side. At last the other nodded.

"Step back, if you please, sir," the man said, and Barry moved away from the opening.

The panel slipped into place, and in an instant the heavy iron door swung out. With a nod to the doorman, they passed through and went on down the hall.

The way was carpeted now and handsomely decorated, while masked lights shed their soft rays. On the walls were large paintings; here and there a palm stood in a handsome jardinière, and bronzes were in each nook.

"I judge we are inside now?" Barry questioned.

"Yes," Herrick agreed as they passed up two steps. "Here is the elevator. We will be in the house proper in a moment."

They got out on the second floor, and Herrick nodded to the attendant. "Sha'n't play to-night," he said. "You can get us a couple of cigars."

"Where is the wheel?" Barry asked.

"In there." His friend nodded toward a back room. "We can wander round. Your man will be somewhere on this floor, or on the one above, if he is here at all."

They walked about slowly, watching the different games which were in progress, and finally came to the large room at the back where the roulette-wheel was being courted.

As they stopped in the doorway, Barry touched Herrick lightly on the arm. "There he is. It is much easier than I thought."

"That is certainly the man we saw at luncheon," Herrick nodded.

The one in question was tall and heavily built. Dressed in faultless evening clothes, he stood directly before the rou-

lette-wheel, and the crowd about him indicated that he was the center of attraction at the table.

Barry pulled a bill out of his pocket and pushed into the crowd at the man's right. Tossing the money on the table, he named his color and glanced up at the other. He was not at all surprised to see a faint bluish scar close to the right eye. It was crescent-shaped, as Helen Gordon had said.

Without paying any attention to the result of the fall of the wheel, other than to note he had lost, Barry turned back to Herrick.

"He's my man! He's got the scar!"

"Sit here, then," Herrick said. "We will have to wait until he gets tired. You can't speak to him while he's playing."

They found two chairs in an alcove that commanded a good view of the room, and waited for over an hour before the man they were watching showed any inclination of tiring.

At last he turned with a sour smile on his lips.

"No luck to-night," he laughed.

"It may change soon," some one suggested.

"No," the man shook his head, "it doesn't work that way with me. I might have known it. It's Friday. I never can win on Friday."

He turned toward the hall, and Barry and Herrick got up. Stepping ahead quickly, Barry caught up with him as he turned toward the stairs.

"May I have a word with you?" he questioned.

The man paused, one hand on the stair-rail, and looked Barry over with a cold stare.

"I don't think I have ever had the pleasure," he began.

"No, I don't think you ever have," Barry agreed in his most winning manner. "I can explain in a few words, Mr. Rutherford."

"What's that?" the other demanded, stepping back like a shot. "What name is that?"

His face went white, while the hand resting on the bannister trembled.

"Am I not right?" Barry questioned.

"I understood that your name was Mr. Rutherford."

"Well, you understood wrong—do you hear me?—wrong!"

Without another word, he turned and hurried down the stairs.

CHAPTER XIV.

SUPPOSE.

BECKONING to Herrick, Barry leaned over the bannisters to watch the man as he hurried down the stairs and turned toward the back rooms on the second floor.

"You say there is but one way out?" Barry demanded.

"Yes, only one, so far as I know. Why?"

"Let's get our hats. Come on."

Herrick followed Barry to the floor below; and there securing their hats, they turned toward the door. As they were about to pass out an attendant stepped up to them.

"You just spoke to a gentleman at the head of the stairs?" the man questioned.

"Yes," Barry agreed, turning quickly. His glance traveled down the hall, and he thought he caught sight of a figure, which moved quickly out of sight, as he looked up.

"The gentleman says that he will see you outside in a few minutes," the attendant answered.

"Very good," Barry nodded. "Just say that I will wait for him."

The way out was not quite as complicated as the way in, although it was nearly as far, through hallways and up and down stairs.

"No one knows how many houses are used," Herrick remarked.

"One, perhaps," Barry laughed. He was in a particularly good-humor, for he felt very certain that he had found his man. "We may be going round and round in a circle."

At last they reached the street, and Barry started across toward the other side.

"We'll wait over here in the shadow until he comes out."

"He is your man, then?" Herrick demanded.

"He says not, but the way he said it convinces me that he is. And then his

sending word that he would meet me out here must mean that he is the one I am after."

The street was deserted. Row upon row of what had at one time been old residences, but were now dirty lofts, with narrow entrances, lined both sides. The two men stepped into a doorway, from which they could command a view of the exit to Lee Larson's place, and waited.

Finally the door across the way opened and a man stepped out. He glanced up and down the street, hesitated an instant, and then moved across the sidewalk to the curb. Barry and Herrick came out of the shadow and started across the street.

For a moment the man watched them; then, turning, he moved slowly away. Without attempting to catch up with him, the two followed.

At the corner of the street the one in the lead stopped, and Barry, moving ahead of Herrick, stepped up to his side.

"If you are sure I'm the man you want to talk to, follow me, will you? I may be watched."

One word tumbled over the other as the speech was delivered, and almost before the last few words had been uttered the speaker had started ahead again.

With a shrug of his shoulders and a smile at the strangeness of the other's request, Barry waited until Herrick joined in; then together they went along after the man.

"I think the whole lot of them must be crazy," Barry remarked in a low voice, adding quickly, "except one."

"We are getting into a bad neighborhood for this time of night," Herrick counseled.

"The deuce you say!" Barry laughed. "Well, we had better run into something—good or bad—pretty soon. Every one seems to find it necessary to take me to the end of nowhere before they can tell me anything, and then no one says a word that sheds any light on any matter. It beats chasing will-o'-the-wisps."

"So you are chasing something?" Herrick questioned.

Barry nodded, and they followed round a corner and very nearly ran over their leader, so abruptly had he stopped.

"Well?" the man demanded as they

stepped back, a little startled. "What is it? You can talk to me here, I guess, as well as anywhere else. I don't know you, and how the dickens you know who I am I can't say."

His tone was a deep growl and his manner rather ugly; but Barry, for some reason, set that down to a desire to hide his real feeling of anxiety.

Assuming a tone that was calculated to appease, Barry spoke:

"Yes, I can say all I have to say right here; but, of course, I want to be sure I am talking to Mr. Rutherford."

"Well, let her go. I guess you won't make any mistake."

"Very well, then," Barry went on. "What I want to say is this: Your uncle is very ill. Your cousin, Miss Gordon, wants to see you. She has a paper for you from your uncle, and she wants to ask you some questions about Miss Roland and Mr. Hardston."

Rutherford waited until the other was through, and then his expression changed to a broad smile.

"You and the whole lot of them can go straight to the deuce. My compliments to my pretty cousin. As for that little sneaking dwarf—may he get what he deserves, and let it be hot. As for Miss Roland? Oh, you can say 'by-by' to her from me. Impress upon her the fact that it is 'by-by' for good."

Barry peered sharply at the other. It suddenly occurred to him that the man was intoxicated.

"How about your uncle?" Barry questioned.

He remembered now that Helen Gordon had said that she did not think her cousin would do anything, but certainly he had not expected to meet with such a manner of indifference. He watched the other closely.

"Uncle Ben?" Rutherford questioned. "Say"—he tapped Barry on the shoulder—"I judge that you come from Helen, so I don't mind talking to you. Come round the corner with your friend, will you? We can sit down and go over it a bit."

They started off again, Rutherford a little in the lead. The man walked steadily enough, and Barry decided that he had been wrong in thinking him under the influence of liquor.

With Rutheford for their guide, they passed through a dark and narrow doorway and down a long hall to a small room at the rear. The place was quite deserted, but with some noise Rutheford roused a waiter and gave his order.

"Sit down." He waved his hand at the chair and tossed a cigarette-case onto the table. "Make yourselves comfortable. We can talk here without trouble and have it all out.

"Do you know," he turned to Barry, "I am rather glad you came. I can send all my messages through you and not have to bother to go out there. Not that I would." He shook his head as he put the match to his cigarette. "Oh, no! Not for worlds. I wouldn't go out there again."

He looked at Barry out of the corners of his eyes, and seemed to find a good deal of amusement in his remark. In fact, he appeared to be in a most excellent frame of mind.

"But to go out there, as you put it," Barry replied, "is the very thing I want you to do. That is, I want you to see your cousin. She will come to town and meet you."

Rutheford shook his head.

"Oh, no, she won't! I have washed my hands of the whole business, and I will not do a single thing. Let them fight it out among themselves. I want nothing to do with the invention. No unknown force for mine."

Barry was considerably taken aback by the other's pointblank refusal. Herrick sat by, an interested listener, his round, jovial face composed for once.

"I don't know a thing about this matter, Mr. Rutheford, beyond the fact that your cousin, Miss Helen Gordon, is troubled and in need of help."

Rutheford drew deeply on his cigarette and nodded.

"You look able-bodied, and she's not a bad sort—though not my kind. Helen is too conscientious. She likes to hustle too much, though she can be good fun."

"You should help her, then," Barry urged.

"My dear fellow," Rutheford laughed, "in my judgment she is not beyond helping herself. And she has got Uncle Ben."

"He is ill, and wants to see you."

Rutheford nodded.

"Sick, is he? Sorry to hear that, but it comes of his dealing with that villain Hardston. He blessed me fine when I told him to look out—you see, I never did like the cuss—and then he got a bit suspicious himself. We had a set-to over that—in a way." Rutheford began to laugh softly. "But it wasn't Uncle Ben's fault so much; I don't blame him. Fact," he went on with great candor, "I'm not the kind to lay it up against any one."

"Then you should go and patch up the quarrel," Barry urged. "Really, I think you owe it to your uncle and cousin to do so."

Herrick, who had been studying Rutheford with a good deal of interest, glanced at Barry. It seemed to him that his friend's suggestions were rather personal, and he looked each moment for the other, whom he understood Barry had never met before, to take offense. Instead, Rutheford seemed to be enjoying the whole affair and not at all loath to talk.

"Patch up the quarrel," Rutheford repeated with a shake of his head. "No, thank you. You don't seem to understand that I quarreled with my uncle on purpose. I wanted him to get mad at me. That was why I kept hitting at Hardston. When he got suspicious himself and asked me to look the thing up for him, why, I just laughed at him—to make him angry, you understand—and I did."

Barry looked at the man before him, who spoke so indifferently, in some doubt.

"Why in the world did you want him to get angry with you?" he finally demanded.

Rutheford began to laugh as he flicked his cigarette carelessly. Then, with a lifting of his eyebrows and in the most indifferent way in the world, he replied:

"Because I didn't want him to make me his heir."

Both Herrick and Barry burst out laughing, and Rutheford looked up at them in astonishment.

"Sure as gospel," and then to Barry: "You ought to be able to guess why."

"I tell you, Mr. Rutheford, I know nothing about this affair, so how should

"I know what you mean?" For the first time Barry had become suspicious of the other's apparent frankness, and was partially of the opinion that Rutherford was amusing himself at his expense.

"Don't know anything about it?" Rutherford questioned, drawing his chair close to the table and laying a hand on Barry's arm. "Say, would you want a thing willed to you that half a dozen other people wanted, and might murder you to get?"

"Murder you!" Barry exclaimed. Rutherford leaned back and nodded in the most solemn manner imaginable. "How in the world does such a condition enter into your helping your cousin?"

"Any one who mixes up in this matter is likely to get his throat cut. So I am showing more sense than I ever thought I had, and dropping the whole business."

"Would you mind explaining what you mean?" Barry questioned.

Rutherford leaned forward again.

"You know that my uncle has discovered an unknown force that knocks the spots off of electricity and steam—a concentrated energy in a quinin pill?"

"I have the newspaper accounts of the matter, and I also have your uncle's statement that his discovery was not perfected."

"His letter to the papers?" Rutherford nodded with a laugh. "That was a blind. Just about the time he wrote that letter he began to get suspicious of that little dwarf friend of his. That is why he wrote the letter."

"It was Hardston then whom he asked you to look up?" Barry demanded.

"I should think it was. He wanted me to go chasing round after some information, and I cut it because I wouldn't get mixed up in the matter."

"But where does the throat-cutting business come in?"

"Uncle Ben wanted to give me this discovery. There are a lot of papers and stuff, and he wanted me to take them. He said he didn't want to bother with the thing. The way he put it was that he had worked it out, and knew it would do all he claimed for it. With that he was content. He just wanted me to have it. I could make millions out of

it, and I was to give Helen half. I'm not for making millions—that way."

"Why?" Herrick spoke for the first time.

"Why have millions and pass in? I need millions, to be sure; but I would rather just worry along with the few thousands I have and keep a whole skin."

"But," Barry interposed, "if you had this secret, it would be surety for your life."

Rutherford shook his head.

"I'm safe as long as I haven't it. If I had it, I'd have to prove it was perfected to make any money out of it, wouldn't I?"

"Yes," Barry nodded.

"Well, what do you suppose would happen to me then? That cursed little lawyer would not rest content until he had got it out of me. He wouldn't be satisfied, either, with just getting it. He'd cut my throat to be sure he would have it all alone—and some one else would help him, I'm thinking," Rutherford ended slowly.

Barry stared at the other in astonishment.

"You are not serious?" he demanded.

"Well, I guess. I won't mix up in the thing at all."

"Tell me," Barry leaned over the table; he was puzzled at what he had learned, "how this prevents you from going to your uncle and making up your quarrel, and thus helping him and your cousin?"

Rutherford drew a deep sigh.

"If I made up my quarrel with Uncle Ben, he would leave me all his papers. I would have this unknown force on my hands and Hardston on my trail. Some morning the newspapers would tell about my passing in—poison or a knife."

"That would result from your quarrel being made up with your uncle! You might be killed. But if that didn't happen, which I am frank to say to you, Mr. Rutherford, I do not believe, Hardston would get this secret, and neither you nor Miss Gordon would benefit by it. Am I right?"

"If my quarrel was made up, which it won't be," Rutherford nodded.

Barry got up and stood looking down on the other.

"Suppose," he spoke very slowly,

Hardston or Miss Roland got some one, that looked a bit like you, to go to your uncle, and, making him believe it was you, thus patched up the quarrel. What then?"

Rutherford waved his hand to Barry in disdain.

"It couldn't be done."

"But suppose it had been done?" Barry urged.

"Well," Rutherford's brow wrinkled up in perplexity, "I don't know. If they did fool Uncle Ben that way, I suppose he would leave the thing to me. Hardston might kill Uncle Ben then, and he could forge enough papers to get the invention into his hands. If he thought I was in his way, he'd end me, I dare say, and then—oh, the dickens, you can't tell what will happen when you begin to suppose."

"Well, you'd better begin to find out," Barry broke in sharply. "They have done it."

For an instant Rutherford stared at Barry. Then he started to smile, stopped, and his face grew white.

"What the deuce do you mean?" he cried.

"Just what I say," Barry replied quickly. "Last night a man went out to Hardston's. He looked a little like you, and he made up your quarrel for you. He fooled your uncle, and he even gave your uncle to understand that some one was all right; that he need not be

(To be continued.)

worried; that, in fact, he had looked a matter up and found nothing. Do you understand now?"

Rutherford drew his glass to him and he drained its contents at one gulp. All the time his eyes were fastened on Barry's face, and into them had come a look such as a whipped and cringing dog might have, when terribly frightened.

"Understand?" Barry questioned again.

He was startled to think of what his act might mean. He could not, would not, believe it was as bad as painted by Rutherford, and yet there would evidently be some result from it. If nothing more, he had perhaps done that which would deprive the rightful owners, by discovery or inheritance, of the benefits to come to them from Benjamin Gordon's discovery.

Rutherford leaned across the table and forced a laugh.

"You are a joke. How could any one do it?"

"But they did. I did it. Look at me. In the dark I could pass for you when no one had reason to be suspicious. I changed my voice. I did it."

For an instant Rutherford stared at Barry and then with a roar he bounded to his feet.

He was no longer the same man, garrulous and indifferent, but one charged with madness and wild anger.

Like a shot he leaped forward.

THE CONQUEROR'S FLIGHT.

By George W. Wilson.

ABOUT two fathers who, fearing their children wouldn't obey, pretended not to allow it.

IT was dark on the terrace; still darker on the lawn and at the beach. Gordon Trent, standing in the shadow of one of the huge palms, gazed moodily out into the night.

At the other end of the terrace, where the Japanese lanterns still flickered fitfully in the wind, a girl paused a moment and turned back.

The last guests were departing, a few intimate friends remaining for a rubber and a cold bottle from the darkest corner of the famous Burr vaults.

The man sank into a chair and waited.

"It's a bitter pill to have to see her like this, when there isn't any reason but

an old man's silly notion. A mythical family skeleton, so old its dust is beyond microscopic visibility."

He sighed and lit a cigarette. A half-hour dragged slowly by. A distant church clock struck—

Slowly—as with time grown weary—
Twelve deliberate strokes in all.

Another half-hour passed.

A door behind him opened softly. A faint stream of light fell across the terrace and vanished as Rosaline Burr closed the door after her.

"Sweetheart!"

Gordon rose eagerly.

She came toward him slowly; a sad, tired little smile gave an added charm to the beautiful face.

"Why did you come?"

"The same old reason."

"And it's just as useless."

"I'm not surprised."

She sat down in the chair he drew for her. "Terrier" jumped upon the table beside her, and she idly stroked his ears in silence. The man railed at the darkness, straining his eyes, longing for even a fleeting glimpse of the dear face.

"We're going abroad Saturday. Leave here to-morrow."

She did not look at him. She knew how the pain would show in his dark eyes. She at least could partly spare herself that.

"And you'd have gone without letting me know? Left me to read it in the papers?"

"Wouldn't it have been better?"

"Possibly. I'd have followed you, in any case. May I ask whose idea this sudden departure is?"

"Father's." I acquiesced.

Gordon smiled.

"I thought so. Suggested when?"

"Discussed some time. Decided last Thursday."

"The decision is final?"

"Absolutely."

"How long are you going to be gone?"

"Indefinitely."

"Do you want to go?"

"No."

"Then it was not your decision?"

"Partly. I'm going from a sense of—let us say—"

"Being bullied into it," he put in.

"If you like," she shrugged.

"Your father's idea evidently is—'Out of sight, out of mind.'"

"Possibly."

"At all events, he thinks you will get over loving me if he keeps you away long enough. What is your theory?"

There was a little anxiety in his tone.

"I have none."

Gordon smiled. The answer did not surprise him; it was characteristically noncommittal.

"Why do you let him bully you into these things?" he asked presently.

"It hasn't been all bully. I have thought he was right."

"Now?" he questioned, eager hope in his voice.

"I'm beginning now to think he is mistaken. We discussed the subject this afternoon."

"Stormy?" he inquired.

"About as usual. He said rather more hateful things about you."

"For instance?"

"I was throwing myself away; that you love me now because you do not possess me. Afterward it would be the same old story—there would be other women. I'd end up in the divorce court."

She spoke calmly, as though repeating old facts, threadbare with discussion.

"Anything else?"

"Nothing I care to repeat, except he asked if you had ever kissed me."

"Yes?" There was a quick catch in his breath, a thrill in the rich voice.

"I didn't tell him the truth."

"Why?" The wicker-chair arm creaked beneath his merciless grip.

"Because that belonged absolutely to me."

Gordon stared steadily at the two lamps on the dock, trying vainly to crush back the memory of that moment.

"What steamer are you sailing on?" he asked unsteadily after a silence.

"Do you think that is kind?"

"No, it's brutal—but I've decided brutality is my only hope."

"If you told that to some one else,

they might believe it. I couldn't. No matter how much you might want anything—even me—you would not be brutal about it."

"Then you think I have a few redeeming graces?" he laughed.

"Several. You are mercifully considerate, and you can be trusted. That is why I granted your request to-night—and saw you."

"Rosaline," he said after a long silence. "We have loved each other two years. Your father has continually refused his consent to our engagement simply because my dad is an inventor and an aeronaut, and, therefore, considered by him a fool; and there is some family feud so antediluvian no one knows just what it is."

"Some antiquated ancestor of your father's stole the idea for a shade-roller from father's ancestor," she interrupted with mock dignity.

"Imaginary!" he scoffed.

"Still, there is war to the death between the two houses. Your father doesn't want you to marry the daughter of a broker any more than my father wants me to marry the son of an inventor," she reminded him.

"Granted. Your father is down on me because I've never been brought up to work, had no business training, and just lived the average life of the son of a man of wealth and position. I can quite understand his attitude in some things, and why you have listened to him.

"He has pointed out to you that a man who can't earn his salt is not capable of taking care of a wife. That if my dad should lose the family millions in some pipe-dream, as your father calls these ventures of dad's, you'd starve before I could earn enough to buy bread. As to my past life, which he condemns, I have met and gone with men and women who, I will admit, were not all they might have been.

"Still, I have not followed their example, or ever done anything I am ashamed of. I have never asked you to marry me without your father's consent; but to-night I feel that the situation is hopeless. Sweetheart, let us take things in our own hands. Be married, and end this living hell for both."

"Madness—thy name is Gordon Trent!" she mocked.

He struck a match quickly and held it above her face. The black eyes belied the mock in her voice. They closed slowly—the match sputtered—went out.

"If I did that," she spoke slowly and with an effort, "I should go to you a pauper."

He leaned forward, holding out his arms eagerly.

"Then come—I want just you!"

She took his hand, and, rising, moved to the little swinging seat.

"Don't make it harder for me, dear. I feel to-night I cannot bear much more. If I had not known your strength, known how completely I can trust you, and myself with you—I could not have seen you—and gone to-morrow. I love you more than ever in my life, just because you have never asked me to do this. I told dad that to-day."

"And it didn't help my cause?" he laughed.

"He said he would thrash you within an inch of your life if he caught you."

"The desire is mutual."

"And impossible from your side."

"Oh, quite; but I can't give you up. He's got to let me have you. Let me see him."

"Useless, dear. In the first place, he wouldn't see you, and, in the second, he wouldn't give in, nor would your father, either."

"Then let's elope; it's the only way. In spite of your father's idea as to my ability to earn a living, if the gods, fate, and you aren't all against me, I can. I've been working," he added quietly, "for the last five months."

"Gordon!—where?" she cried.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"In dad's shop, on the place. A mechanic—forty a week. I couldn't afford automobiles, pearl-girdles, or that sort of thing; but I can give you a home, and love you with—"

"Simons, Simons, where is Miss Rosaline?" an irate voice thundered.

The girl sprang to her feet; the man rose slowly.

"It's father; he's missed me. Go—quick!" she whispered, trying to push him toward the terrace steps.

With a low, exultant laugh, he caught her in his arms.

"Not alone."

"Please!" she implored.

Gordon shook his head.

"Rosaline! Rosaline!"

The voice was coming nearer. A light down the terrace was switched on.

"Who the deuce is there?" stormed old Mr. Burr as he limped along.

"Gordon, please—I can't bear his ranting to-night," she pleaded brokenly. "I'll come—to you—later."

"Now is our only chance, dear heart."

She threw a frightened glance over her shoulder at the figure approaching.

A muffled explosion; the steady whir of a powerful engine.

"Oh, I thought as much—darn your young insolence!" shouted the old man as he tried to hasten his steps. "I'll be rid of you to-morrow for good and all, you young cub; and before I go I'll tar and feather you!"

"Gordon, it's almost here!" Rosaline's arms tightened around his neck. "I—I can't go—ask him—" she pleaded piteously.

"Mr. Burr, won't you relent and give Rosaline to me?"

"You brazen young cub! I never heard such insolence!" the old gentleman shouted, his face purple with rage. "Give you my daughter. No!" he roared.

Rosaline looked over her shoulder.

"Come!"

She broke from Gordon's embrace, caught up the evening coat from the back of a chair, and ran down the steps to the waiting car.

It started almost before she was in. Gordon leaped into the rumble, and, like a thing possessed, the car raced through the night, followed by a duplicate fiend.

"They're catching us, Thorne; hit her up for the Conqueror's shed!" Gordon shouted to his chauffeur as he clung to the seat.

A gray flash, a cloud of dust, and the car shot like a meteor through the east gate of the Trent estate, past the garage, around the bend out on a cinder track.

"Hit her up; they're still coming!"

Half the circle was made, through another gate, down a narrow lane, into a strip of wood, out and across a meadow. A long siren shriek rent the air. Down at the edge of the inlet, two white lights flashed twice.

"Give her some more, Thorne!" Gordon urged, his voice hoarse with excitement.

"Can't, sir; she's gone the limit."

The big car rocked and swayed as it bounded along the uneven road, and the girl clung with nervous strength to the seat. Once she turned a white face to the man leaning over the back.

"We'll be there in a minute, dear."

"Where are we going?"

"To the sky; where they can't follow. There's only one Conqueror!" he answered grimly.

The bark of a revolver sounded above the roar of the machine. The big car swerved violently, leaped back into the roadway, and tore on.

"The tire!" Gordon groaned. "The old Tartar is a good shot," he added aloud. "But tires are expensive targets at any time, and it won't hurt them to lose a few."

Leaning far out over the rear of his car, Gordon drew a small box from his pocket, strewing its contents in a broad path across the road.

Sharp, ear-splitting explosion after explosion followed in quick succession. The pursuing car still came on.

Rosaline closed her eyes in an agony of suspense and fear. They had lost. There would be a scene; she would take that ride again with her father—and to-morrow—she moaned at the thought.

The speed of the car slackened almost suddenly. It was still under headway as Gordon leaped to the ground and almost lifted her out.

"Run for it, sweetheart," he cried as he caught the two suit-cases that, already, willing hands had unstrapped from the car.

"This way, Miss Burr," a voice called from out the shadow.

As she ran, Rosaline saw with throbbing pulse the dim outline of the great dirigible air-ship. A dense shadow among the blur of shadows. She ran lightly up the few steps of the ladder,

and with a sense of unutterable relief stepped over the side into the basket.

"Lively there, boy!"

Gordon paused, one foot on the ladder, the other in the basket, peering down through the darkness to catch a glimpse of the dear familiar face.

"Dad—you here?"

A hand reached up and grasped his. That was all. Already, the propellers were revolving with a roar that drowned all but their master's voice.

"Cast off!"

Slowly, and with the grace of an eagle, the huge air-ship rose majestically. Higher, higher it soared; swung in a long, splendid circle out over the dark waters of the Sound, and shot off eastward over the tree-tops.

"Stop them; I say, stop them!" bel-lowed old Cyrus Burr as the disabled car limped up to the shed. "How dare you aid and abet such rascality!" He thumped the floor of the car with his cane—literally gasping in his rage.

The elderly man in mechanic's clothes looked after the rapidly vanishing green and red lights.

"If I'd been able to fly, I wouldn't have killed two horses in one night," he remarked, more to himself than in answer to the question.

"Did you run away, too?" Mr. Burr's tone was more peaceful.

"Yes, I married the woman I loved the same as my boy's going to, and just as you did."

"Then, sir, why didn't you let him marry her?" raged old Burr.

"I knew he would, if he loved her. I wanted to find out. That is why I refused my consent, and later, when he asked again, cut off his allowance. I thought that was a pretty sure way to find out if it was the lasting kind."

"Then, sir," old Burr sputtered, "you knew they intended to elope."

"Purely accidental," Mr. Trent answered with an amused smile. "I came down here to the laboratory after dinner, and overheard Gordon talking to Rosaline's maid and his chauffeur, Thorne. The maid promised to pack a suit-case and see that Thorne got it; the men in the shop promised to have the Conqueror ready for an instant's flight. So I just stayed round to see that everything was O. K. and see them off.

"The boy knew you would give chase if you found out, so it was arranged that if you followed they were to make for the air-ship, and, once there, they had you. He went over in his car just about the time your dinner guests were leaving, so the arrival of an automobile would naturally not rouse any suspicions. You know the rest. Pretty clever, I thought."

"Humph!" snorted Mr. Burr. "Pretty nervy, I call it. Good thing for me the Beach's chauffeur was sick and didn't come for them. I'd just ordered up my car to send them home. I'd never have been in to even this much of a finish."

Mr. Trent chuckled quietly.

"Does that young rascal know anything about running that fool of a thing?" Mr. Burr demanded.

"What he doesn't know wouldn't fill a book. Love's the best professor there is. He's been working here in the shops with me for the past five months. I'm satisfied."

"Humph, I guess we're both satisfied. Why didn't he tell me that? Take me home, Trent, and we'll open a bottle and drink their health. But it's rascally nervy to rob a lonely old man of his only child!"

"You did it yourself. They are both chips of the old block," Mr. Trent remarked quietly.

"Come on!" sniffed Mr. Burr.

THE BARRIER.

Anonymous.

WHEN Happiness comes knocking at my door,
I may not lift the latch to let her in,
Because—ah, me! one forced his way before—
The ugly fantom of an ancient sin.

THE CATACLYSM.*

By Stephen Chalmers.

How twenty-five brave men took service in the graveyard of the sea, and how the ruin they wrought engulfed the world.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

SICKENING for adventure, Penrhyn Masefield, millionaire explorer and soldier of fortune, and his friend, Dicky Schuyler, under the guidance of the former's Kabyle servant, Ahmed Aziz, gather a band of picked men and start south on Masefield's yacht, the *Ulysses*, on an adventure, the nature of which is unknown to all save Ahmed. Among the adventurers is a man named Anton, also a great traveler, and in the party much against the will of Ahmed, who, as a servant, is unable to prevent his coming. They sail to the Sargasso Sea; the yacht, because of an upheaval of the ocean, makes its way into the weeds, strikes a channel, and proceeds to an island on which dwells, so Ahmed tells Masefield, the Sidi Senussi (the Veiled Prophet), whose object is to bring about universal peace, and who is powerful enough to force it on the world. This conversation, which takes place in strictest privacy, is overheard by Anton, who, upon Masefield's upbraiding him, makes revengeful threats. Masefield meets the Sidi Senussi, with whom he falls in love. None other on the island knows the Sidi Senussi is a woman. By means of the wireless on board the *Ulysses*, the demand for peace is sent broadcast over the world, and the nations finally agree to gather and sink their armaments. They are to come to the Isle of Peace. Masefield learns that adjacent to the Isle of Peace is an island on which are imprisoned untamable creatures, descendants of Norsemen, who have turned rebellious. Even while the Armada of Peace is approaching, these people, fired by the treacherous Anton, have risen and stolen the Sidi. Masefield starts in agonized pursuit through the underground passages of the palace.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MYSTERY SOLVED.

AS Masefield rushed through the labyrinthine corridors of the Palace of Peace on the heels of Ahmed Aziz, he became aware that for the first time in its history the isle was in a state bordering upon panic.

The arrival of the advance ships of the Armada of Peace was reason enough for excitement, but the disappearance of the Sidi Senussi, the pivotal center of all that had happened and was about to happen, flung the priests and the inhabitants of the isle into a frenzy of fear.

White-robed priests and purple-clad slaves rushed blindly through the palace, spreading the dire tidings of the veiled prophet's disappearance.

They were met by others who brought the exciting news of the armada's ar-

rival. The air was vibrating with the roar of saluting cannon—sounds which had never before disturbed the peace of the quiet isle. It was as if terror and pandemonium had suddenly been let loose in an earthly Elysium.

In the confusion of it all, Masefield and Ahmed were unnoticed. The Kabyle swiftly passed on through a maze of passages which turned and twisted and seemed to double back on themselves. But never once did the son of the desert pause, and Masefield's implicit trust in him was presently rewarded.

After descending, at intervals, flights of winding stone stairs which seemed to lead to the foundations of the palace, Ahmed stopped short before a dark doorway.

Had it not been that Dicky Schuyler had distinctly stated that the door was without the palace and some distance to the rear of it, Masefield would have be-

lieved that this was the place the irrepressible had spoken of as "the jail." But this was under the earth and beneath the palace itself.

The adventurer turned to his servant and scanned his face for some hint as to the meaning of the expedition. Ahmed's visage was stamped for a moment with dismay. He was looking at the door of studded hardwood, and seemed to find cause for dread in the fact that it stood half open.

"The Sidi has passed this way," he said quickly. "The Sidi has gone to plead with them once more. It is death!"

"What do you mean?" shouted Masefield, his patience exhausted.

"The warriors," said Ahmed Aziz, enigmatically. "They fear the Sidi, who has walked unscathed through their midst before. But this time they will kill the Sidi, who alone held them in check. Follow me, master. You shall see with your own eyes—and know."

He passed through the dark doorway, Masefield following him. For a few minutes the adventurer was walking blindly through almost gravelike gloom.

He could discern, however, the white glimmer of Ahmed's robes, and to this his eyes clung as he stumbled forward over a rough flooring, apparently of stone.

Presently his eyes became used to the gloom. He observed that the place was not absolutely dark. It was illumined by a strange bluish light. Where this light came from he could not imagine. Later it dawned upon him that the air was charged with phosphorescence.

Presently he made out that they were passing through a natural tunnel, the arching walls of which were of a white, gnarled stone—some form of coral which everlastingly dripped water. The flooring of the passage was of the same substance, but it was rough and slippery, and at intervals there were pools of seawater which gave off the bluish light more strongly.

When they had gone about a quarter of a mile, a hollow humming overhead suggested to Masefield that he and Ahmed were walking under the sea. This idea was presently verified by a heavy reverberation directly above their heads.

At the same time a shower of water-drops fell about them.

"The war-ships — guns!" said Ahmed, without pausing, but with an upward lift of his hand.

On they went through the ghostly submarine passage. The way seemed miles long to Masefield, and every step of it was punctuated with some feature which chilled the blood momentarily. The coral, in some places, had fashioned itself into grotesque shapes, so that the tunnel, to the heated imagination, was swarming with strange creatures.

And every moment a fresh salute was fired away up on the surface of the sea. The ocean reverberated against the coral roof; the coral shuddered and seemed to crack, and the still pools shivered and rippled restlessly. Every moment the mind expected to experience the crash of collapsing walls and the booming of the merciless sea through that narrow place.

They had been walking about twenty minutes, though the time seemed longer to Masefield, when Ahmed stopped before another door. This door also was open, and, like the one in the foundations of the palace, it was crossed and studded with iron bars and bolts.

But the time which they had taken to traverse the tunnel and the distance which they had covered, precluded any idea of its being the door of which Dicky Schuyler had spoken. That must be a third door, probably situated in some branch of the tunnel near the palace.

This thought in Masefield's mind led to another. From the palace foundation to this second door the tunnel had run comparatively straight. No longer could be heard the ocean gurgling overhead; the vibration of the saluting guns seemed less and more distant—as if left behind. They were again upon land. But what land? It could not be the Isle of Peace.

His mind flashed back to that first glimpse which he had had from the deck of the Ulysses. He remembered that there had been two islands, one to the eastward and smaller than the Isle of Peace. It was inhabited, too, he suddenly remembered, and there had been a town of odd-shaped houses.

But interest in it had been eclipsed at the time by the beauties of the greater island. Later, the smaller island had

dwelt in Masefield's mind as merely an outer key—one of the numerous small islets which stud the great Bahama belt, which stretches in an arc from the coast of Florida into indefinite reefs, hundreds of miles to the southeast.

This second door must give entrance to the smaller island which, Masefield suddenly recalled, was significantly named Forbidden Island. Up to now it had merely been a name, but all at once he thought he saw a solution of Anton's mysterious disappearance and the harsh, throbbing chorus which he had so often heard when the wind was in the east.

Most important of all, he began to see now where the Sidi had gone—whether carried by force, or voluntarily.

By this time Masefield and Ahmed Aziz were through the door and floundering amid darkness which was intense after the faint bluish illumination of the tunnel under the sea.

A minute later Masefield struck against Ahmed's hand, which had been thrust back in the gloom as a signal to the white man to pause. At the same time the Kabyle whispered:

"Be very still, my master!"

Masefield remained where he had been stopped. Not a sound came to his ears, save Ahmed's deep breathing. He could see nothing. He could feel no particular sensation in his mind or body. In the blackness of this place he could almost imagine that he had been dreaming and had suddenly awakened from a fantastic nightmare, to find himself looking up into the midnight darkness of his cabin aboard the *Ulysses*.

Presently a flicker of pure blue appeared ahead and a little above the level of Masefield's eyes. The rift was in the shape of three sides of a square, one side wider than the other two, which tapered in parallels into sharp points. In a moment Masefield knew that Ahmed was lifting a great trap-door, and that the blue light was that of the evening sky, which was soon revealed in all its starriness.

Ahmed's head was silhouetted against the now full square of light. In another moment the square was disfigured by the Kabyle's body as it ascended through the trap. Ahmed disappeared, leaving the trap-door wide open. Masefield reached

to the ground and felt a flight of stone steps. He walked lightly to the highest and raised himself through the trap. He was on land—strange land. In an instant he was sure that it was Forbidden Island.

But his attention was withdrawn in a second to the action of Ahmed Aziz. The Kabyle was crouching close to the ground and, to the astonishment of Masefield, who had become used to disassociating Ahmed and his ilk with blood-thirstiness, the servant had a long, thin knife gripped between his teeth. In the same glance Masefield caught sight of Ahmed's prey—a tall, almost gigantic figure which stood a few paces away, black against the starry skies.

The figure was half naked. Around the middle and fastened over the left shoulder was a great, hairy skin. The bare right shoulder and arm stood out white and muscular. In the right hand was clasped a battle-ax, while on the left wrist was buckled a shield. The figure was like the ghost of an ancient Norseman.

How long the tableau lasted Masefield never knew. It seemed an eternity while he listened to the most barbaric uproar which the mind could conceive. It was a wild confusion of metallic clashing and ribald shouting and singing; yet all smote upon his ear with a throbbing rhythm, as if the authors of the savage noise were dancing in time to the ferocious war measure.

How long the picture lasted matters little. The figure, which had been intent upon the same sounds, suddenly turned and saw Ahmed. With a snarl of rage it leaped forward. At the same time Ahmed Aziz sprang erect and toward the giant. Masefield saw the shield lift and the great ax swing against the heavens.

He saw Ahmed spring and the glitter of the long, thin blade. Then, without a sound, the mighty man in the hairy raiment collapsed like a felled tree, with a red rivulet streaming from his throat. Ahmed Aziz, priest of peace, had slain him as remorselessly as a butcher would a bullock.

The Kabyle drew his blade through the grass and turned to the astonished Masefield.

"Come, my master," said he, quietly. "It is well."

"Ahmed Aziz," said Masefield hoarsely, "where am I? What does this mean? Is the Sidi—here?"

He waved his hand toward the collection of odd-shaped houses, in the center of which was a great square building, which rose in pallid whiteness behind a flare of fire. It was from this center of light that the discordant chanting arose.

"The Sidi is there," said Ahmed. "Come. I go to my master, or to death with him. Will the lion-heart follow Ahmed, as Ahmed has followed him?"

"I will follow you, as I have already followed you," said Masefield. "But, first, forewarned is forearmed. What does this mean?"

A shadow of impatience crossed the Kabyle's face. He led Masefield forward by the arm, rapidly speaking in a low voice:

"This is the Forbidden Island," he said. "This is the place apart where discord is imprisoned by the Sidi and the priests. Did the *giaour* think there was no worm in the peace of our isle? Was the *giaour* a child or a fool? Through the centuries it has been thus. They were men of all nations from the ships of all nations which you saw.

"The first were of the Norse and they loved war. They are Norse in lust and battle." He waved his hand toward the miniature city. "You saw that man—his size—his strength—his raiment. They are still Norse, and the others have learned their ways. They have increased with the years. They number thousands."

"And the Sidi?"

"The Sidi has striven with them to abandon their creed and be at peace. They have honored the Sidi. He has walked unscathed among them—alone—once, twice, thrice! But, in some manner, they have learned of the world's peace—"

"Anton?"

"The *giaour's* eye is as the camel's on the desert. He sees the real from the shadow. This is the work of the Sheik Anton. Here he has hidden; but here, we thought, he was safe. Yet the doors have been unlocked—how, I know not—and the Sheik Anton has passed between

the islands. Day by day their clamor has been greater. But we were without fear, until to-night, when the Sidi vanished."

"She may pass unharmed!" cried Masefield, clutching at a thread of hope. "She may have come to speak peace again."

"That may have been her intention," said Ahmed quickly, "but my master is not deaf. He heard the cry. She was taken—by force—by the Sheik Anton."

Masefield groaned, quickening his pace and in turn dragging Ahmed forward. "We must save her!"

"We go to death," said Ahmed quietly.

But Masefield did not hear, or cared not. The Sidi was there—his sweet Sidi—among a thousand monsters.

In a few minutes they came to the edge of the flaring town, and there a sight met Masefield's eyes which sent the blood flying helter-skelter through his veins.

Ahmed crouched in the long rank grass at the edge of the savanna which they had crossed. He drew Masefield down beside him. Looking straight ahead, they could see into a wide plaza which was surrounded by crude, square buildings.

The greatest of these was the vast white building which the adventurer had first noticed.

Lights were burning everywhere. It was a scene of the wildest gaiety of debauchery. In the center of the plaza burned a huge bonfire, around which hundreds of gigantic figures, armed and shielded, leaped and danced and shouted, striking their brazen shields with swords and axes, to the rhythm of a horrible war-song. And tied to a stake in the bonfire was a white-robed figure, around which the flames were curling hungrily.

Masefield's heart stopped beating and a red mist spread before his eyes. But when he dashed his hand across his vision, a groan of relief burst from his heart. That was no human figure which crowned the pyre of fagots—at least, not the figure which he had feared to see there.

It was an effigy—an effigy of the goddess of peace! The warriors were burning it as the crowning jest of their

hideous war-dance. At that moment the cannon of the last-arriving war-ship roared through the night.

The dance paused. The flames ran over the white-robed effigy and consumed it. Then a shout of savage mockery split the air, and the warriors, with one accord, shook their spears, axes, and swords to the stars and laughed—laughed—laughed!

And the Sidi was there—somewhere there. Probably she was in that great white building, at that moment in the toils of the Sheik Anton. Anton, Masefield knew, must have torn the veil from the Sidi's face and discovered the resplendent loveliness which had been behind it.

At the thought of her peril the sweat rolled down Masefield's face. Regardless of the odds he sprang to his feet and would have dashed into that mad throng of barbarians, had not Ahmed flung his arms around his master. For a minute the two men wrestled madly. It was the lithe son of the desert against the mighty Anglo-Saxon—cunning against strength. Masefield, his face ablaze with fury, bent the Kabyle backward until it seemed that the servant's back must break.

"Will you let me go!" gasped Masefield.

"Some one—comes—master!" the Kabyle managed to articulate.

Masefield came to his senses on the instant. He released the faithful Ahmed and glared around him in the night.

A dark figure was stealing toward them across the savanna, in the same direction which they had come. The adventurer drew a blue-barreled weapon from his hip and leveled it through the darkness.

"Halt! Who comes?" he demanded quietly.

It was Ahmed who spoke before the intruder could answer.

"It is the Nubian!" he whispered. "He brings word."

"Advance," said Masefield, lowering the revolver.

The Nubian stole forward and held out his hands in token of peace. When within a few yards, he knelt on the grass and made the sign of the hand.

"It is well," he said. "The Sidi is within the palace."

For a full minute neither Ahmed Aziz

nor Masefield found their voices, so great was their stupefied amazement. The Nubian understood. Bowing low, he added:

"These be the words of Al Hafid to Ahmed Aziz and the excellency."

"The Sidi in the palace!" Masefield echoed dully.

"Even so, excellency," said the Nubian. "With mine own eyes I have seen him."

Masefield turned to Ahmed. The Kabyle was looking at his master with wide-open eyes, and the question in them was clear. Something whispered to Masefield that all was not as it should be.

Ahmed was asking himself another question. Who had passed through the doors of the submarine passage and left them open? None but the Sidi had that power and privilege.

Still, the Sidi was in the palace. Ahmed knew that the Nubian spoke the truth, so far as he knew it. There was nothing to do but return. Certainly no good could come of remaining on the Forbidden Island in the inflamed state of its inhabitants and in Masefield's reckless mood.

"Master, let us return," Ahmed said.

Still doubtful of the truth of the Nubian's statement, Masefield followed Ahmed and the slave back to the trap-door. Over the body of the slain Norseman, Ahmed Aziz paused a moment while he prayed. Then, making the sign of the hand, he dropped through the trap-door into the tunnel, Masefield after him, with the Nubian bringing up the rear.

In silence they walked under the strait to the foundation of the palace. Here Ahmed stopped in momentary astonishment before the heavy iron-studded door. It was shut and locked!

For a moment or two the Kabyle stared with a frown. Then he smiled to Masefield and said:

"My master sees. My master will remember that this door was open. Now it is closed and barred. The Sidi has returned."

"And we," said Masefield with a laugh, "are locked in!"

"Not so," said Ahmed, and he turned to the Nubian. "How camest thou?" he asked.

For answer the Nubian turned into a

passage which branched off to the left. A hundred yards along this minor tunnel he paused before another door. Masefield knew at once that this was Dicky's "jail door." The Nubian drew a great key from the folds of his purple raiment and unlocked the barrier. Beyond the door was a short cavern, and beyond that was the clear air. Masefield smelt the sea and the perfume of a million flowers with a sigh of relief. They were once more in the gardens of the Isle of Peace.

Without waiting for Ahmed Aziz, or the Nubian, he walked rapidly toward the palace portals. Passing through the Hall of the Fountain he came to the guarded entrance to the Sidi's apartments. The single Nubian there made way for the familiar excellency, who passed unhindered through the audience-chamber into the Sidi's bower. She was not there!

Filled with a renewal of his worst fears, he started at a run through the passage which he had traversed with the Sidi when she took him to the parapet.

When he reached the little white-curtained doorway, his heart was beating with fear, hope, excitement, and suspense. He did not pause, but boldly thrust aside the curtains.

She was there! Against the dim light of the stars she stood, her face veiled, looking strangely erect against the clear heavens. She turned at the sound of his step, and gave a great start—whether of surprise or fear he could not tell.

"Sidi!" he whispered, stepping out upon the parapet.

She drew back from his extended arms, and laughed—a queer, half-choked laugh. He guessed on the instant that she was overwrought, and that she had undergone some terrific strain. Still, with his arms out and whispering her name, he moved toward her. But again she drew back.

Suddenly, she flung out her right arm and pointed seaward.

"See!" she exclaimed, with a note of triumph. "It is mine—all *mine!*"

He looked too startled by her vehemence to do anything else.

It was a magnificent sight.

As far as the eye could travel, the ocean was aflame with fire—rows upon

rows of lights—ships outlined in hull, water-line, and rigging, in electricity.

Masefield could now understand her pose, her emotion, her gesture.

This was her work, her triumph, hers—all hers!

The fears of the night fell from him like clouds before sunshine. A mistiness of joy and pride came before his eyes.

He turned to her with a choking sensation in his throat.

"Oh my Sidi!" he whispered.

But she had vanished—again!

And again his heart was filled with dread, misgiving, and doubt.

CHAPTER XV.

ON EARTH—PEACE!

WITH the first day of the new year dawned the first day of the new era. At sunrise the temple bell had boomed its solemn note, the hand of peace had lifted in benediction to the highest pinnacle and the ships of all the nations of earth had dipped their ensigns to that universal flag.

The voice of the Sidi had cried from the parapet and she had lifted her hands in universal blessing. The mighty matin-song had swelled through the still air and the men who manned the world's navies had bent their heads in reverent awe, to listen.

No man had ever witnessed a more simple yet inspiring ceremony. Even the full-blooded youth of the battle-ships felt for the moment that peace was better than the battle for which their hearts had lusted.

Presently the scene became one of quiet activity. Boats were lowered from flag-ships and rowed ashore with the almost mechanical precision of naval movements. In the stern of each, facing the bluejackets, were officers in full dress uniform and sovereign representatives in the somber attire of fashion.

Upon the marble terraces the priests and inhabitants of the Isle of Peace stood like a silent white army, awaiting the delegates. Not a sound disturbed the scene, save for the sighing of the seas and the breeze and the lulling strains of the pinnacle lyres—not a sound until the first boat touched the landing terrace.

It was the British boat.

As Lord Airdmohr stepped ashore he removed his tall hat and bowed with polished grace. He murmured a few conventional phrases to Al Hafid, who replied with a word of welcome in the name of the Sidi Senussi and a smile that was all his own. Then his lordship adjusted his monocle and surveyed the palace and the people with a leisurely stare.

But all the self-suppression of centuries of refinement could not down his amazement. He suddenly whipped the glass from his eye and turned to Al Hafid.

"'Pon my word!" he cried. "Was there ever anything so perfectly lovely?"

"Nothing, save perfect love, excellency," said Ahmed Aziz, over Al Hafid's shoulder.

At the strange voice his lordship screwed in the monocle once more and stared at the Kabyle. The Kabyle was the man who had spoken, undoubtedly; yet the man who had spoken had betrayed his alma mater—Oxford.

"Ah!" said his lordship, discovering Ahmed's identity.

And that was all he said, although he continued to survey the man in whose hands the peace of Algiers and Morocco had lain so long—the man who, more than any other man, was responsible for universal peace.

And so, reflected his lordship, this was the redoubtable Ahmed Aziz. A very remarkable man, he concluded inwardly as if in echo of Masefield's own estimate of his servant.

Presently the French boat came alongside. The delegate leaped ashore with celerity, and advanced toward the group with his arms extended. He was a little man with a nervous manner and *pince-nez* balanced dangerously on the very tip of his nose.

The drama of peace was upon his soul. Tears rolled down his cheeks, and next moment he was in Al Hafid's arms, much to the lofty disgust of his lordship of Great Britain.

The German boat came next. A heavy gentleman with spectacles and a Bismarckian countenance solemnly advanced and shook hands with Al Hafid and the whole row of elder priests, one by one. The Japanese envoys—three of

them—came next, and made their stiff, little, acquired bows to all and sundry, after which they drew apart from all other nations and furtively made notes on their cuffs.

The American representative came ashore with an easy nonchalance which brought a smile to Al Hafid's face. The old priest did not forget Masefield's part in universal peace, and took the opportunity to congratulate the United States on the possession of his excellency, Masefield.

"What!" ejaculated the United States delegate. "You don't mean to tell me that Penrhyn Masefield is at the bottom of this?"

Al Hafid waved his hand toward Masefield, who stood a little way apart on the terrace, with his arms folded. By his side was Dicky Schuyler, a less silent spectator of events.

The American envoy stood looking at the adventurers for a moment. His jaw almost dropped. Then, unmindful of all convention, he darted up the steps with his right hand extended.

"Masefield, I always said that you'd plunge the United States into something radical; but who'd ever have thought it would be peace!"

"Why, Kerr—by all that's lucky!" cried Masefield, recognizing an old acquaintance. "How on earth did you get here? Last time—let's see?—you were fighting for the repeal of the duty on tea—or something. Let me introduce Mr. Schuyler—Richard Schuyler."

"Mr. Schuyler—How-d'do, Mr. Schuyler," said Mr. Kerr, shaking hands with the irrepressible, who drew himself up with dignity, as he always did when Masefield honored him with the "Richard." "Yes," continued Mr. Kerr, "it was tea. That's eight years ago, Masefield. But I'm the Human Cork. My original ancestor must have floated to the top at the deluge, as I would, I dare say, in a cataclysm."

In an hour the entire delegates and their escorts were ashore and assembled in the Sidi's audience-chamber, which had been illuminated for the occasion. Beside the dense mass of curtains stood the Sidi's throne, the Nubians on either side, with their little lamps burning mystically.

As Masfield looked at the throne, he saw again the vision of his first day there, when she had risen to deliver that impassioned speech. His heart ached, and the motley of envoys around him—Orientals and Occidentals—faded away.

He only wished to see her—her real self; to be sure that it was she; to know that she was safe; to hear her well-remembered, unmistakable voice.

For the doubt was still knocking at his heart. Was it she who had screamed? Was it she who had passed alone through that dread passage beneath the sea, leaving the doors wide open? Was it she who had returned and locked them? How had she escaped death among that savage horde on the Forbidden Island, if, indeed, it was she who had gone there? Was it she who had drawn away from him on the parapet and pointed with triumphant gesture to the Armada of Peace and cried:

"See! They are mine—all *mine!*"

But his doubt was presently to be set at rest, or made certainty. A sudden hush fell upon the waiting envoys. The temple bell boomed thrice through the palace. Then not a sound was to be heard but the lyres and the tinkling of the water as it fell from the hand of peace in the Hall of the Fountain. A whisper went through the audience-chamber.

"The Sidi Senussi!"

Masfield took a step forward. His body fell rigid. His eyes burned in his head as they fixed themselves on the dense mass of crimson curtain. She was coming—the Sidi!

He would look closely at her. He would mark every line of her body. He would penetrate the veil and see her eyes. He would listen and hear every syllable that fell from her lips.

A murmur went through the chamber. The curtains had fallen aside as if a magic hand had touched them. And, lo! the white figure of the wonder-worker was revealed to the expectant eyes of the envoys of the nations which had lain down together at the Sidi's voice.

At the very first glance, Masfield's heart leaped with relief. It was the

Sidi—his Sidi! He knew that turn of the arm as her hand gathered the filmy draperies around her. He knew that carriage, although it seemed to him unsteady, as he had seen it once before when she was laboring under great emotion. He only waited to hear her voice to be sure.

She advanced to the throne, mounted it, and turned to face the world's envoys. Her right hand was raised above her head. The fingers half closed, except the forefinger, which lifted in the sign of peace.

Her voice came through the stillness:

"My lords and gentlemen! You are welcome."

A shaft of delicious pain shot through Masfield's heart. It was the Sidi. It was the voice of the Sidi—the sweet, bell-like tones which he had heard in the softer words of love.

The cloud rolled from his mind. It had all been a mistake. It was not she who had passed through the tunnel. She had never left the palace. It was the Sidi—*his* Sidi!

But—Something was wrong! From the heaven of relief he was again plunged into the hell of mental torture. She was addressing the envoys. Why did she falter? Why did she trip over the words? Why was her voice so quiet and tremulous—so faint?

Why, when she had finished her brief words of welcome, did she descend from the throne and pass through the curtains? Masfield saw her hand a rolled document to Ahmed Aziz. He saw her sway lightly as she walked toward the curtains. He saw her pass out as if some greater will than hers was drawing her steps.

A murmur of astonishment broke even from the envoys. The star performer in the great drama about to be enacted had made exit before the envoys had had time to feast their eyes upon the magician who had wrought this wonder of the world.

But another surprise was being prepared for the delegates. Ahmed Aziz advanced to the foot of the throne and turned to the audience with the document in his hand. Masfield knew what it was. The envoys divined. It was the peace message.

But was this peace message, which so concerned the white races, to be read by a swarthy son of the desert—a Moham-medan—a *blackamoor*?

My Lord Airmohr whipped the glass from his eye and stared—an unrefined stare of astonishment and anger. The French delegate whipped off his *pince-nez*. Symptoms of dissatisfaction appeared among the delegates.

Ahmed Aziz took in the situation at a glance. Whatever had been his intention, he did not betray by a movement of his face that he had ever had an intention. Masefield perceived that something had gone wrong. The Sidi, his heart told him, was unable to proceed. The reins were in Ahmed's hands.

But Ahmed was equal to the occasion. He addressed the envoys in a quiet, submissive manner, which won instant tolerance. The Sidi was much moved, he said. The Sidi desired to be alone in this great moment.

The Sidi believed that the peace message should be read by one who was not an envoy. If it should be agreeable to all, the message would be read by one who had rendered service to all and to the cause of peace—the Hon. Penrhyn Masefield!

Masefield came to himself with a shock. He—*he* was to read the peace message to the delegates of the world. What did this mean? Was it another whim of his lady, or a resource of the fertile Ahmed?

But he had no time for thought. The envoys were waiting. They were gazing at him with perfect satisfaction and friendliness stamped on their faces. His lordship of Great Britain smiled and nodded his head.

"Hustle, your honor!" whispered Dicky. "For the glory of little old New York—hustle!"

"Quick!" whispered Mr. Kerr, the United States representative. "It's a feather in my cap!"

Before Masefield fully realized it, he was standing at the foot of the throne with the rolled document in his hand. Presently, amid a hush, he heard his own voice coming from the other end of the universe in the opening words of the message.

Like its great predecessor, it was characterized by simplicity, brevity, and earnestness. It set forth the beauties of peace, the benefits to be derived therefrom, and the manner in which these benefits might be attained and kept permanent.

As Masefield read, his voice took on strength and enthusiasm. It was *her* message. It was *her* voice that was speaking through him. It was the message that he and she had written together during those long, sweet days. As he read of love—"love everlasting"—he could feel her hair brushing his neck, her breath touching his cheek; and the sweet perfume of her body was in his nostrils. His voice rang out with the spirit of the message—"love everlasting, peace on earth and good will among all men."

When it was finished, he stood still for a moment, with his head bent. He was moved. But so also were the envoys of the nations. The French delegate was in tears, and even his lordship of Great Britain was standing very erect—very grave—very severe.

Then, and for the last time, the vote was taken. Again the vote was unanimous, save for three opposing ballots. Again there was silence. Every eye was on Masefield. Something was expected of him. What? He looked at the sea of faces with bewildered eyes.

The British statesman calmly nodded his head and smiled encouragingly. Masefield understood, but his heart sank at the magnitude of the words which he was expected to utter.

His eyes fell upon two faces in the crowd. They were the faces of Dicky Schuyler and the United States representative, David Kerr. All at once Masefield's voice returned to him, for their words echoed through his mind.

He drew himself erect and faced the envoys of the world with quiet, manly dignity.

His words were simple, but they came from the heart of a strong, honest man, and they carried their own power with them:

"Then, in the name of heaven, in the name of the sovereigns and rulers of earth, and in the name of all mankind—let there be peace."

He, himself, was startled by the effect of his words. A mighty cheer burst from the lips of the assembled envoys. It shook the walls of the audience-chamber, reverberated through the palace and out over the sea to the listening ships.

It swelled and died and, in dying, found new life and redoubled in volume. Presently it found an echo in a terrific uproar from the ocean. The navies of the world were discharging cannon in honor of the first day of the new era, and the crashing of the guns seemed to be answered by a blast of trumpets in the very vault of heaven.

Masefield could stand it no longer. He had looked for some extraordinary scene, even if it were a climax of complete fiasco. But for this he was unprepared. Before his vision was millenium. The lion was lying down with the lamb.

The British envoy was solemnly shaking hands with the delegates of the other nations of earth. The French envoy was sobbing in the arms of the German delegate, the Russian representative was holding a Japanese by the shoulders, while the irrepressible Dicky was waltzing another Jap around the audience-chamber.

The Hon. David Kerr of the United States was bowing his acknowledgements to the representative of Alfonso of Spain. Sweden and Norway were cementing renewed friendship with handshaking and tears. And, above it all, the hand of peace was waving from the highest pinnacle, and the navies of the world were thundering and roaring, dipping their flags and cheering.

But Masefield's heart was with the Sidi. He escaped from the frenzied audience-chamber and rushed up the winding stairs which led to the parapet. To clasp her to his heart, to look into her eyes, to hear from her own lips that all was well—it was for this, and this only, that his heart hungered.

He reached the parapet. She was not there. She was not there to look upon her amazing victory! Masefield stared like one bereft of memory.

He looked out over the sea. It was covered with dense, white clouds of smoke, through which peeped the tips of funnels and spars. Above his head he heard a mighty rushing sound.

Looking up, he beheld a cloud of snowy, white doves ascending straight into the sky. Trailing behind them were long ribbons of a million colors, which bore the glad tidings to heaven and earth.

But where was the Sidi?

Where *was* the Sidi in this awe-inspiring moment?

Masefield turned toward the point where the wild bananas and the seagrapes overshadowed the little cove of their happiness. She was not there!

As his face looked in that direction, slowly over it came a spasm of pain and fear.

The wind was wafting from the southeast, and again he heard it—throbbing, menacing, defiant, horrible!

CHAPTER XVI.

PEACE AND PANDEMONIUM.

It was ten o'clock of the forenoon of New Year's day when peace—universal peace—was declared.

The next hour was given over to the bursts of enthusiasm which shook the air. Aboard the *Ulysses*, and aboard the flag-ship of each nation, the wireless operators were tuning in various stations on the American coast, various naval stations among the West Indian islands, and whatever steamships answered; and to all those the good news was being flashed and, through them, to the wide world.

In less than an hour the four words: "Peace has been declared!" had been flashed through the greater part of the civilized world.

As when the guns bellowed beside the Isle of Peace and the white doves flew to the heavens, the message was the signal for the most stupendous celebration in every capital, city, town, hamlet, and cottage in Europe and the Western hemisphere.

It was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon when the news was received in Europe, owing to the difference of time. It was dawn on the Pacific coast of America. It was between ten and eleven o'clock at night in Japan. But from the extreme east to the extreme west of the earth, the air was vibrating

with the rejoicing of earth's peoples. For war should be no more!

For an hour after the peace message had been read by Masefield, all procedure was stopped. It was impossible to proceed, although the greatest item on the peace program was yet to be executed. By common consent the envoys adjourned, agreeing that the noon-hour would be appropriate to the disarmament of the navies—the casting of the weapons of war into the sea.

Besides that, the envoys must prepare the document which, signed by each and every delegate, representing each and every nation of earth, would seal the great compact.

It was then that Masefield understood why he had been allowed to read the peace message. That document was merely the final, clarified proposition of peace.

It had been accepted, and its acceptance was clearly set forth in the proclamation which the envoys now prepared. It did not take Masefield and the United States delegate long to discover that none but the Sidi Senussi could read this final proclamation.

Among the delegates there was no question upon this point, although Masefield could not help wondering how the Sidi was to be reached, or if the Sidi would be able to read it.

Yet, this was not in his mind as much as the probable impossibility of finding the Sidi Senussi. The more he thought of it, the more was he convinced that something was grievously amiss.

The suspicion had gradually strengthened upon him that Anton's hand was at work behind the scenes. Although he felt sure that the Sidi who welcomed the envoys was his Sidi, he could not reconcile his Sidi with the veiled figure which had pointed to the Armada of Peace and said:

"See! It is mine—all *mine!*"

The words had echoed dully through his brain, and with constant repetition the last emphasized word had begun to shout through his mind with a sinister, harsh note. *Mine!*

The word echoed and echoed, now a sibilant whisper, now a jeering chuckle, again a mocking laugh; and, presently, the whole sentence sang through his

brain to the air of that throbbing, menacing, war-chant.

And that figure on the parapet had looked taller in stature, and without that lissome slightness which he knew so well. He remembered the poise of the figure against the stars. *That* was not the Sidi. Yet, the Sidi who had entered the audience-chamber *was* the Sidi. Then he remembered the peculiar behavior of the Sidi in the audience-chamber—how the voice—her voice—had quavered and stumbled over the words of welcome, and how she had suddenly swayed toward the curtains.

Was it possible that she was in the toils of Anton even then? That the terrible renegade was using her to his own ends, whatever they were? Was it possible that that figure on the parapet was not the Sidi at all?

But who, save himself, could discover this? No man had ever gazed upon the face of the Sidi save himself. He alone could tell the face of the Sidi.

True, he could tell Dicky the truth, if Dicky did not suspect it already. But what good would that do? It would be his word against—nothing. He dared not tear the veil from the Sidi's face in the presence of the priests, and even if he did—

With a groan he turned away from the council-chamber where the envoys were still discussing the ultimate proclamation. Near the door he discovered the Kabyle, whose eyes, had he but known it, had never left him in the last fifteen minutes. Masefield made a signal to Ahmed just as Ahmed signaled to him.

Together, master and servant passed into the Hall of the Fountain. There they sat down on the alabaster parapet, within which the water-lilies basked in the sunshine from the overhead circular rift. The sunlight fell upon Masefield's face as he looked into Ahmed's.

The white man was pale and haggard. The Kabyle's eyes were burning strangely.

The servant waited for the master to speak.

"Ahmed," said Masefield, "I wish to speak with the Sidi."

"The Sidi Senussi would be alone," replied Ahmed, smiling strangely. "It

is impossible, my master, to see or speak with the Sidi at this time."

There was silence between the two. Masefield was searching the other's face. Presently he said in a low voice:

"Ahmed, hast thou ever gazed upon the face of the Sidi?"

"No, my master," replied the Kabyle easily. "Nor has any man—save it be thyself, *giaour*!" he added fiercely.

Masefield did not flinch before the eyes that suddenly burned like a tiger's. He waited until Ahmed lowered his gaze, then he whispered:

"I know that no man is permitted to gaze upon the Sidi's face; yet, Ahmed, answer me! Would you know the Sidi otherwise? By the height? By the gesture? By the voice? Would you not—"

Ahmed interrupted in a startling fashion.

"The *giaour*," said he, "wastes words! It was the Sidi, and it was not the Sidi. Do I not know my master? Does not my heart feel his dread presence? Do not my ears know his footsteps? The Sidi is in the hands of the Sheik Anton!"

Masefield started to his feet. His words came fast—almost incoherent:

"Then, where is the Sidi? Who was it spoke from the throne? Who was it spoke on the parapet? Ah! You were not there. But, I tell you—Ahmed, what is to be done?"

"Nothing," said the Kabyle quietly. "That which is done—is done. That which will be—will be!"

An exclamation of impatience at the man's stoic fatalism burst from Masefield. But Ahmed's words were not all stoic fatalism. He looked anxiously into the face of his master and said slowly:

"*Giaour*, it is in my mind that the Sidi is in the hands of the warriors; or, worse, in the hands of the Sheik Anton. Haste, then, will help neither the Sidi nor us. At the noon-hour—you have heard?—the Sidi will—*must*—appear. The Sidi must read the message—the real Sidi or the false.

"If it is the real Sidi—it is well. She shall be carefully guarded, and there will be no further mishap. If it is the false Sidi—"

"He will die!" whispered Masefield

in an intensity of anger. "I will kill him where he stands."

"In the hour of universal peace?" said Ahmed Aziz, watching the other's face closely.

"Confound universal peace!" cried Masefield, springing to his feet. "I tell you, Ahmed, there will be no universal peace on earth so long as a man loves a woman and the red blood flows hot in his veins."

His words recalled another scene—the little inlet where the multicolored fish played and darted away from the ripples started by the pebbles which he threw from her lap. And he heard her voice in the distance:

"Some day, when war has been dead centuries and centuries, all men will love one another as you love Dicky."

It was a flash of some idle brain-cell. It was as if, in answering Ahmed, he had been answering her. His mind suddenly cleared, and the fighting blood of the man for the woman of his love suddenly flowed strongly and steadily.

He looked at Ahmed. The Kabyle had watched the tempest and knew that it was over. He was smiling.

"Does my master still trust his servant?"

"More than I trust myself. You are no longer my servant."

"Still may I serve my master in serving you."

"What will you do?"

"At the noon-hour—mark!"

Masefield drew his watch from his pocket. It lacked but ten minutes of the hour. Already the envoys were filing back into the audience-chamber. The guns had become silent. The palace was wrapt in profound stillness, save for the everlasting hymn of the lyres.

Masefield suddenly felt an arm thrust through his. He looked into the face of Dicky Schuyler. For once the irrepressible's countenance was stamped with gravity. Masefield saw, and knew that Dicky knew.

"Stand by for trouble, Dicky," he said quietly.

Dicky nodded, but uttered not a word.

They were presently joined by the Hon. David Kerr.

The three men moved in a group into

the audience-chamber. By dint of courteous pushing, they succeeded in reaching the inner edge of the circle of envoys and found themselves standing by the side of Lord Airdmohr, to whom the place of honor had been accorded.

It was a repetition of the former scene. Tense silence prevailed. Slowly the minutes passed. My Lord Airdmohr held a gold repeater in his hand.

To Masfield's strained senses came the ticking of it, like the beating of his own heart. Lord Airdmohr suddenly drew a deep breath, pocketed the repeater, and looked toward the dense curtains. At the same moment the temple bell boomed thrice.

It was noon! The great moment had arrived. The curtains at the farther end of the chamber parted. A white figure appeared and advanced to the throne. Masfield bent forward, and in an instant his blood surged in mad battle-lust.

That was *not* the Sidi!

He knew, even as he had known that the figure in the previous scene *had* been the Sidi. The gesture was missing. The figure was taller, and moved with none of the queenly grace of the Sidi.

Masfield turned to look at Ahmed. The Kabyle's eyes were glowing like coals. But Ahmed Aziz turned to Lord Airdmohr and bowed. His Britannic majesty's envoy handed him the document which the envoys had prepared.

Ahmed took it and advanced with deliberation toward the throne. His eyes were fixed upon the white figure. He paused at the foot of the throne. There was a lingering air about the way he delivered the document into the hands of the veiled prophet.

It was as if he was prolonging the ceremony for some reason of his own. Indeed, Masfield noticed that the hand which prematurely stretched forth to receive the paper trembled and drew back as Ahmed still held his arms at his side.

Then Ahmed Aziz did a strange thing. As he handed the document to the veiled figure, he suddenly knelt and grasped the Sidi's wrist with his left hand, while he imprinted a kiss on the veiled hand which was extended to receive the document.

It was a strangely awkward saluta-

tion, the envoys thought; to Masfield alone was the action fraught with significance.

Masfield's eyes never left the figure on the throne. He was watching every movement. And his suspicions were confirmed by the actions of the veiled prophet.

The Sidi took the document, bowed to the assembled envoys, and calmly handed it back to Ahmed Aziz, at the same time making a gesture which was meant to be a command that some other person read the proclamation.

A low laugh broke from Masfield's lips. Lord Airdmohr started and frowned disapprovingly on the man at his side.

He discovered that Masfield's face was stamped with ferocity; that there was a cruel smile about his mouth.

For the Sidi—or the figure which represented the Sidi—had reckoned without convention. He had apparently hoped that the proclamation could be read, as before, by Masfield. He knew, also, that no man had ever seen the face of the Sidi, and he knew that he was safe as long as he did not utter a word that would betray a strange voice.

The envoys were waiting. Ahmed Aziz, smiling, had turned away from the veiled prophet and was returning to his place among the priests. But suddenly, at a signal from Airdmohr which plainly said, "The Sidi must read," the Kabyle turned and looked back at the throne.

Then, after a moment of mystified silence in the chamber, the astute son of the desert advanced once more, and with the same deliberation, toward the Sidi Senussi.

To the envoys it seemed that he purposed whispering Airdmohr's message. But during the few seconds of stillness, it was apparent that the veiled figure was in the throes of unexpected suspense. No longer could the envoys remain blind to the fact that something was amiss.

Ahmed had purposely created this embarrassing situation that the nerves of the impostor might be tried to the utmost. And his plan was not without result—a result which was apparent even to some of the priests, who began

to whisper among themselves while their eyes searched the figure on the throne.

But Ahmed Aziz was not done. Instead of kneeling at the foot of the throne, he advanced boldly up the steps. A gasp of amazement arose from the envoys. A murmur of horror broke from the priests. They forgot their momentary suspicion in dismay at Ahmed's irreverent action. They only remembered that this was the Sidi Senussi, and that Ahmed Aziz was guilty of a terrible breach of decorum.

But Ahmed passed up the steps as deliberately as he did all things. The Sidi drew back. Ahmed suddenly straightened up and raised his hands. A cry burst from the priests. My Lord Airdmohr whipped his glass from his eye, and various exclamations of disapproval burst from the envoys.

Only Masefield understood. At Ahmed's first movement, the adventurer pressed Dicky Schuyler's arm and stepped out from the semicircle of representatives.

But before he had gone three paces, the audience-chamber was in an uproar of indignation. Ahmed Aziz had flung his arms around the veiled figure, and the dread Sidi Senussi was wrestling in the arms of the swarthy son of the desert. The two figures, interlocked, fell to the steps and rolled downward to the carpeted floor, still writhing in each other's embrace.

The envoys broke from the semicircle, protesting incoherently. The priests raised their hands to heaven and, crying their horror, rushed toward the combatants. But Masefield was quicker than them all. His tall figure shot across the intervening space.

They saw him bend over the writhing figures and with one swift movement tear the veil from the face of the supposed Sidi Senussi!

At the same time Ahmed Aziz broke away from his opponent and leaped backward. Masefield dragged the unveiled Sidi to his feet, and the face of Caspar Anton was revealed to every person in the room!

It was as Masefield and Ahmed Aziz had anticipated. But they, in turn, had reckoned without possibilities.

The very moment Anton stood up in

his borrowed robes, with a wild cry of dread the priests, to a man, turned away and hid their eyes, that they might not look upon the naked face of the prophet.

Even had they looked, it would have been of little help to Masefield and Ahmed Aziz. The priests had never seen the face of the Sidi. They had never seen the face of Anton!

They would only have seen a face which might have been the face of the Sidi. Any face that was strange might well be that of the Sidi.

And the envoys were in the same state of ignorance. They had never seen Anton. They had never seen the Sidi. It was all a mystery to them, save that an outrage—a terrible outrage—had been perpetrated. In that solemn moment, when peace was to be proclaimed and war was to be no more, a mocking destruction of the fitness of things had occurred.

Masefield saw the disaster in a moment. Anton saw it. He calmly rearranged the veil round his face and attempted to return to the throne with the dignity befitting a monarch who could afford to overlook the actions of madmen.

At the same time the envoys bore down upon Masefield and Ahmed Aziz, intending to seize them. My Lord Airdmohr issued a command to the escort of armed marines which had accompanied the delegates. In an instant a score of Mausers were leveled at the two daring men.

To fire a shot in that audience-chamber in the moment of world peace would have been an act of fatal diplomacy. The envoys knew it. Masefield knew it. Masefield did not even draw a weapon. He looked at the angry throng before him and smiled. Some one brushed his shoulder. It was Dicky Schuyler.

"Stand by for trouble!" said Dicky cheerfully, standing back to back with Masefield.

A fourth man leaped into the circle of three. It was the Hon. David Kerr, representative of the United States.

"This means ruin, anyway!" said the Human Cork. "So I'm with you. But I hope to Heaven you know what you are about."

"We do," said Masefield calmly.

All this had transpired in less than half a minute. And, in the meantime, pandemonium was shrieking through the palace. The Sidi Senussi—or rather the veiled Caspar Anton—was standing erect, with his hand raised in the sign of peace. With difficulty, silence was restored.

But before the Sidi could speak, Lord Airdmohr's voice choked off the words which would have revealed all.

"In the name of peace!" Airdmohr cried, "I demand that these men be removed from this place."

"Remove them!" cried the Sidi from the throne, his voice palpitating with the rage which had burst from control.

At once he had betrayed himself to the priests, although, to the envoys, the uproar which followed was but confusion upon confusion's head.

The white army of holy men, descended upon the impostor with the rage which only insulted piety can feel.

The envoys stood aghast. Several turned and left the hall.

Next moment a terrific crash resounded through the air. It was the voice of the guns!

Such a scene as then ensued no words can convey to the imagination. The envoys were rushing aimlessly and panic-stricken.

Caspar Anton, the veil again torn from his face by the infuriated priests, was backed up against the throne, firing rapidly from a revolver.

His eyes fell upon Masefield. Anton leveled his weapon at the man who had ceased to be his friend. But, even as he fired, the priests again closed in upon him. The bullet flew wide and struck one of the great hanging-lamps.

The lamp burst and its blazing oil was showered upon the carpeted floor, which immediately caught fire. In another minute the audience-chamber was filled with choking smoke, through which leaped long, red tongues of flame.

Through the blazing room there suddenly shot the figure of Lord Airdmohr. He was hatless and disheveled. His face was as pallid as a dead man's. Aloud he cried, with an hysterical split in his voice:

"Heaven have mercy upon us! The

navies of the world have turned their guns upon one another!"

But that was not all.

The words were hardly off his tongue before there leaped from all directions, like ghouls and demons born of the roaring flames, scores of shaggy, monstrous men, armed with spears, swords, and axes.

They swooped down upon the hapless priests and envoys with a mighty cry:

"*Skoal!*"

The warriors of Forbidden Island had broken loose. Anton's triumph was complete. The battle-ships, for some mysterious reason, had opened fire upon one another.

The Isle of Peace was a sudden hell. The palace was enveloped in flames. The Sidi was missing.

Universal peace, in the twinkling of an eye, had turned to universal war!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ARMADA OF STEEL.

THE escort of marines, who had been about to throw down their weapons, obeyed the order of their lieutenant.

The envoys were huddled together like sheep. A wall of armed men surrounded them with their Mausers "ready."

"Fire!" came the command.

Masefield, Dicky, and the Hon. David Kerr, lost somewhere in the dense smoke, instinctively fell on their faces. The walls of the audience-chamber shook with the confined explosion of the rifles.

Bullets zipped in the air and thudded sullenly into the walls, and the cries of the wounded redoubled. Again and again the volleys burst out, but each time their volume was less.

The marines were being cut down by the hairy Norsemen, whose thirst for blood knew no caution. Presently, above the yelling of the warriors and the roaring of the flames, the rifle reports grew spasmodic, and finally only the occasional crack of a weapon told of the last stand of the survivors.

Ahmed Aziz groped blindly for his master.

"*Giaour!*" he said with a sob. "It was a mirage. Let us go forth."

"The Sidi!" cried Masefield hoarsely. "Where is the Sidi? Lead the way, or *I will kill you!*"

Ahmed straightened up. His figure was only an arm's length from Masefield, but the adventurer could not see the Kabyle's face, so dense were the fumes. But he heard his voice, calm once more:

"My master, we go to the Sidi or to death. Follow me, but first let the excellency, Schuyler, return to the Ulysses. Let the captain weigh anchor and sail westward along the coast, and let him watch the shore for a signal. We may need succor."

Dicky heard and needed no more. He felt in the gloom for Masefield's hand.

"Good-by, old horse," said he. "If we don't meet here or in heaven, we'll meet on Broadway."

"Good luck to you, Dicky!" said Masefield. "I'll go with Ahmed. You take Kerr with you. He's a very remarkable man, my servant, and Kerr is bound to float out somehow."

In another second Dicky and Kerr had vanished, trusting to luck to get out, as Masefield trusted to luck and to Ahmed to find the Sidi Senussi in this whirlpool of disaster and flame.

Ahmed caught his master by the sleeve and led him through the choking gloom. Round them pandemonium still reigned. The audience-chamber was no longer the hall of universal peace.

It was a shambles. The marines, the priests, the envoys had been massacred to a man. The uproar was dying away, as if the blood-lusting fiends had swept through the palace and out of it.

In a few minutes Masefield, scorched and bloody, found himself in a corridor which was filled with cool, comparatively clear, air. How the two men reached there unscathed neither could ever tell. Both were wounded, but not dangerously. Both were scorched, Ahmed being the worse off in this respect. His white robes were almost burned from his body. He was half naked.

"Go on!" said Masefield, hardly realizing the unreasonableness of his command.

But Ahmed seemed to understand, and he apparently knew where he was

going. Again, as on the previous night, Masefield found himself running through labyrinthine passages; but this time the trend of their flight was upward, ever upward. The air grew warmer and the ascending smoke more dense as they climbed the spiral stairways.

They came to a gloomy, half-finished part of the palace. Presently Ahmed Aziz burst open a door. He entered and immediately reappeared, dragging a hideous, toothless old man, who whined aloud for mercy. Ahmed drew from the folds of his half-consumed clothing a little bow with a thong stretched upon it.

"Where is the Sidi?" he demanded, slipping the bow-string around the man's neck.

"Mercy, excellency! I know not!" screamed the wretched creature.

Ahmed Aziz gave the bow a single twist. The man's face became convulsed and his mouth opened. The Kabyle relaxed the thong and repeated his question. This time the man spoke truth:

"Come. She is here. I will show you."

Ahmed heaved a sigh of relief.

"Allah is great!" Masefield heard him mutter. "I thought so." Turning to Masefield, he said quickly: "The Sidi has been imprisoned."

The toothless old jailer drew a bunch of keys from his girdle and shuffled along the narrow, dark passage, mumbling to himself. The fear of the bow-string was upon him.

He did not hesitate when he paused before a narrow closed door, but fitted a key into a lock and turned it with celerity.

"Behold, excellency. Abdul kisses your feet!"

Masefield brushed him aside and stepped into the room. Ahmed Aziz would have followed, but he suddenly turned and waved the toothless jailer in before him. Abdul's face expressed his disappointment. He had hoped to lock the excellencies in and let them kiss their own feet.

But when Ahmed Aziz entered the room, his hungry eyes were unsatisfied. Instead of the dread master whom he worshiped, the only occupants of the

room were Masefield and an extremely beautiful woman who was sobbing on the adventurer's shoulder.

The moment he became aware of the Kabyle's presence, Masefield commanded him sharply to lead the way out of the palace to safety.

"But the Sidi, my master?" said Ahmed Aziz, folding his arms and assuming a reproachful sternness.

Masefield laughed.

The Sidi blushed, and all at once she drew the veil across her face. The moment the familiar aspect of the dread prophet was complete, Ahmed Aziz presented a face upon which *nothing* was the principal expression.

He had seen a beautiful woman, and in the flash of a gesture, that woman had suddenly been transformed into the dread presence.

"Come!" said Masefield impatiently. "Time flies, Ahmed. The palace is burning. I will explain in time. This is the Sidi Senussi. Her face needs no veiling. Besides, unveiled, she will pass unrecognized."

As he spoke he gently disengaged the veil from his beloved's face. For a moment she stood gazing with liquid eyes at Ahmed. Then she spoke:

"Ahmed—my faithful Ahmed!"

At the words, the Kabyle forgot or forgave. He dropped at her feet and bowed his head. She raised him by the hand. Then Masefield uttered a warning word.

"Come, my master!" said the Kabyle, and he led the way back into the corridor.

The toothless jailer, Abdul, had vanished, but Ahmed did not pause to inquire into his disappearance. Again they ran blindly through the smoke-filled halls. Only Ahmed's instinctive knowledge of the labyrinthine passages brought them to the open air.

But, before that, as they descended a flight of spiral stairs, a terrific crash had resounded, and the walls on either side of them had quaked and cracked.

"Quick!" cried Ahmed Aziz. "The palace is falling."

"No—not yet," said Masefield, his eyes wide with astonishment. "They are *bombarding* the palace!"

In a few minutes they were at the

door through which it had been the Sidi's custom to make her exits when she went to the little cove.

The scene that presented itself to their eyes was as amazing as it was magnificent and dreadful. The palace gardens were strewn with dead men; among them envoys in fashionable attire, marines in uniform, and a few of the hairy men of Forbidden Island.

In the offing hung a great pall of smoke, through which spurted flashes of fire, followed immediately by the roar of guns. The disrupted Armada of Peace was engaged in the most extensive sea-fight the heavens had ever looked upon.

But in the gardens there was comparative safety. The battle seemed to have passed that way and on to some other point. But it was far from perfect safety. Even as they paused to draw a deep breath of pure air, another ball hurtled through the air and struck one of the pinnacles of the palace.

Only the fact that the spire collapsed to the western, or opposite, side of the palace, saved the trio from instant death beneath the falling débris. As the pinnacle fell the lyres suddenly ended their song of years, and from the yawning gap in the alabaster leaped a great column of flame. The palace was doomed!

Masefield turned to the Sidi. Her face was deathly pale and wrought with an anguish which found an echo in Masefield's soul.

He swiftly picked her up in his arms and followed Ahmed Aziz, who was already running across the gardens toward the wooded part of the island. They reached the cool shelter of the woods without mishap, and there they rested for a few minutes.

But they were not out of danger yet. Over their heads, at intervals, hurtled screaming cannon-balls, and shells burst with terrific reports among the trees.

"If they are firing at the palace, it's bad shooting," said Masefield. "If they're firing at each other, it's atrocious. It's more like the practise of a pack of untrained landmen."

Suddenly a thought occurred to him. But he dismissed it immediately as the fancy of an excited imagination.

Also at the same moment his atten-

tion was drawn to a crashing in the woods, like the rushing of a body of men. It was. A man in European civilian dress appeared through a break in the trees. In a single moment he had covered the trio with a repeating-rifle.

"All right, Roberts, all right. It is I—Masefield!" sang out the adventurer.

He had recognized the man who once said that he might be a coward, but was certainly no fool.

The man, Roberts, dropped his rifle and gave a whistle. At once the escort of picked men, all armed, sprang out of the brush.

"Thank Heaven!" said Masefield under his breath. Outwardly calm, he said to Roberts: "Glad to see you. How did you come here?"

"Mr. Schuyler, sir," said Roberts, saluting, "gave us the tip to look out for you, as you might need help to get to the yacht."

"Bless the boy!" Masefield said to himself.

He gave the order to form around the Sidi. When this was done, the party, led by Ahmed Aziz, struck across the island, bearing in a southerly direction. In about half an hour they emerged from the woods upon a white beach. The sea stretched before them, sparkling and clear; and, lying as close inshore as she dared, was the yacht *Ulysses*.

The leader of the picked men, Roberts, discharged his rifle. It was answered by a toot of the yacht's whistle. A boat shot out from her side and came rapidly toward the shore.

A groan of relief burst from Masefield. He bent his head and looked into the still face which was cradled upon his shoulder.

The Sidi was unconscious.

It is needless to recount the difficulties which Dicky Schuyler and the Hon. David Kerr overcame before they reached the *Ulysses*.

On such a day, and in such scenes, the greatest perils were as wind-puffs compared with the one astounding thing which was taking place.

The *Ulysses* was under full steam, but hove to when Schuyler's boat ran

alongside. Dick speedily introduced Kerr to Captain Carlson, and as quickly accounted for Masefield's absence. Carlson sprang to the bridge and signaled the engine-room.

"I'm mighty thankful to get out of this," he said. "Couldn't do it, though, without orders."

Schuyler could not help admiring the cool nerve of the Swede. The bravest man might have been pardoned for sailing to a safer harbor than the bay of the Isle of Peace appeared to be at that moment.

To the eastward lay the great pall of smoke which had astonished Masefield as he issued from the palace. From this cloud burst an ear-splitting pandemonium of sound. It seemed that nothing less than every war-ship in the world could be engaged in battle.

The air was filled with shrieking shells which hurtled through the rigging of the *Ulysses*. But so far the yacht had escaped any crippling damage. As she darted away to the westward, keeping the shore as close as was safe, Schuyler turned his eyes toward the palace. It was in flames. Smoke was already issuing from the upper windows of the pinnacle. Even as he gazed, a shell struck the highest pinnacle, which collapsed in a cloud of dust.

At the same time a fierce column of flame suddenly leaped up against the blue skies.

"Heaven help Masefield!" groaned Dicky Schuyler, turning away his head aghast.

When the yacht was clear of the greater danger of being struck by the flying shells, Carlson turned to Dicky and the United States delegate with a grin.

"Beats me!" was all he said.

"It is perfectly simple," said Kerr; "so simple that it is stupendous. The old feeling broke out apparently. There were never two ships of two different nations anchored in the same waters that something didn't blow up. But this—"

He flung his hands up dramatically in the air.

"You're all wrong," said the Swede quietly. "I'm not blind, Mr. What's-Your-Name?"

"Kerr," said the Human Cork imperturbably.

"Kerr," said Carlson, with a swift, puzzled glance, "the navies didn't start it. Where did the boatloads of hairy fellows come from? That's what I want to know."

"There was a fight on the Japanese flag-ship. Presently the Jap was seized, and the flag-ship fired on the Connecticut. The whole United States navy seemed to open fire. A stray shell hit a German, and the Germans let loose. England was the last; but when she got going, the whole jig was up. And—you see for yourself!"

He waved his hand toward the dense cloud which vomited fire and fury. And so this was the end of universal peace! But what was to be the end of this universal war?

In a safe fathomage, at a point whence the men aboard the Ulysses could command a view of the coast, east and south, the yacht hove to. The men on the bridge, taking up their binoculars, scanned the shore for a sight of Masefield and his friends.

A boat was dropped from the davits. All was therefore in readiness when the party appeared from the woods and the rifle-shot rang out.

The shot was heard distinctly. The fact brought the attention of Carlson to the other fact that the firing among the war-ships had ceased. There were occasional rattles of small arms, as if fighting was going on upon the decks of the various ships.

"I'd give a lot to know what is happening behind that cloud of smoke," said Carlson, jamming his peaked cap on the back of his head.

"Temples of Isis!" exclaimed Dicky, who was watching the approaching pinnacle. "If he hasn't got the Sidi with him!"

Which would indicate that Dicky was well informed of the true inwardness of Masefield's love-affair. In a few minutes the party was aboard.

Masefield staggered breathlessly up the gangway with the unconscious woman held firmly in his arms. Reaching the deck, he turned sternly to Carlson and sharply ordered:

"Full steam ahead—for the open sea! Get out of this as you value your life and ours. Ahmed—to the bridge and pilot!"

He disappeared below, carrying his precious burden. Dicky Schuyler and Ahmed ran up the ladder to the bridge. They discovered Carlson leaning far over the rail with binoculars riveted to his eyes. The man's pose was one of rigid tenseness.

The breeze had freshened in the west, and the cloud of smoke was sweeping away to the eastward. Already scores of battle-ships were in full view. The navies of the world were somewhat lessened in number of ships by the fact that many had been sunk; but the fighting fleet which survived that international engagement was still of stupendous size.

Even as they stared at the armada of steel, the Union Jack fluttered to the decks of the British sea-monster. Instantly a mighty cheer rang out and a great red flag was run up to the ship's peak.

"In the name of Heaven—what's that?" demanded Carlson, cramming the glasses into Schuyler's hands.

Dicky looked. Then he said, without removing the glasses:

"Unless I'm blind, it's a red flag with a big, black, hairy fist in the middle of it."

"And what does that mean?" cried Carlson.

It was Ahmed Aziz who replied.

His voice was quiet and calm, but there was no mistaking the depth of the suppressed sorrow in it.

"It means," said he, "that the envoys of peace are dead. It means that the brave officers who commanded that fleet have been shot."

"It means that the men who manned these navies have been defeated, or have cast in their lot with the ruffians who now hold the decks."

"It means that the Sheik Anton commands that great armada of steel, and that he will wage war against all mankind. *He will loot the world!*"

And the world, robbed of its defenses, was as helpless as a newborn babe in a cradle!

(To be continued.)

POD FLITS.

By George Allan England.

ADDITIONAL proof that
"stone walls do not a prison
make, nor iron bars a cage." *

TO Pod Slattery, sitting dejected in his narrow cell in the Ponkapog county jail, the rural turnkey delivered a newspaper which had been sent him, so its wrapper said, by one P. Benyon, New York City.

The wrapper was no longer on it, for Warden Tibbetts had ripped it off preparatory to inspecting the paper, lest in its bulk be hidden some metal tool, some "dope" or other contraband. But Tibbetts had discovered nothing. Though he had scanned the whole paper, sheet by sheet, he had found it innocent of guile. A certain blue-penciled article had, indeed, arrested his suspicious eye, but it had been merely an account of a riot at Tammany Hall.

"Nothin' to object to here," he had said to Turnkey Bartlett. "Let him have it." So Pod got the paper.

Wearily he unfolded it.

No avid reader, Pod. He was pining for the open, now that spring was coming over the hill—longing for the good green Fields of Graft, where erstwhile he and Bender had so joyously disported, before that misplay of the Old Homestead had combined with his own defective sprinting qualities to land him in the place of tin spoons, striped clothing, and barred windows.

"Readin'!" he scoffed disgustedly. "Who wants t' flash a lamp at readin', I'd like to know, with all those tricks just waitin' to be trumped on the outside?"

He yawned voluminously. Then his dull eye caught the blue-penciling.

"Eh? What?" he queried. "That looks like news from home!"

He read the article all through, squint-

ing in the dim light of the cell. Then he turned the paper over and looked carefully at the back of it. He passed his fat finger over the surface. A smile broadened his good-humored face.

"Huh!" he grunted. "I guess that's what it is, all right, all right—news!"

Once more he scanned the text with minute attention, holding the paper close to his eyes with one hand, while with the other he scratched his bald spot. When he had quite finished, he held the paper up to the dull square of light which seeped in through the window from the jail yard.

Never in his life had his perceptions been more keen. Here, there, in certain letters of the print, minute holes showed, mere tiny punctures with the finest of needle-points.

Long, lovingly, Pod studied these punctures. Dawning comprehension brightened his smile. Half an hour or more he studied, by the fading light. Then he nodded, and with a sudden access of joy noiselessly slapped his leg.

He heard the *pad-pad-pad* of the turnkey's rubber soles coming down the corridor. Instantly he tore the paper into bits and flung it on the concrete floor.

"Huh! Who th' devil wants t' read stale news, in here?" the turnkey heard him growl disgustedly. Then came a rattling of the cell-door.

"Hey there, Bo, can't you give us somethin' that ain't green with moss?" Pod hailed.

"Shut up in there, you, or I'll report ye!" Bartlett retorted, as, frowning, he made his way to the office.

II.

ONE week from that day a book came to the Ponkapog jail addressed to Mr. William Slattery, and, this, too, reached his hands.

Warden Tibbetts, of course, looked it all through; but who could object to a

series of essays on "Moral Regeneration" by the Rev. Kenneth Blair?

Pod let the turnkey see him dutifully reading the first of these essays; but that afternoon, at the early supper-hour, he "palmed" a tin spoon from the table, and took it with him to his cell.

Before the lights were all put out, at nine o'clock, he had straightened the handle of the spoon till it made a sort of blade, and had pried open the thick pasteboard back cover of the volume.

From a little cavity deftly fashioned there he withdrew a very thin tablet of some reddish substance and a tiny camel's-hair brush. These he hid under his mattress.

The book, after having carefully pressed its cover together again and rubbed the edge with pipe-ashes till the split was hidden, he stood on the little corner shelf, along with the compulsory Testament.

Next morning he chewed his day's allowance of tobacco into a strong quid and tucked it close up under his armpit, where he held it all day long. And in the quiet hour between eight and nine, when prying eyes were few, he sought out his brush and tablet.

Wetting the brush in his mouth he rubbed it on the tablet. The brush grew red.

"Anilin's the stuff, an' no miss-play. at that!" he murmured, as with deft dabs he spotted his face, neck, chest and arms with a fine red "rash." These he labored over till they were perfect.

"Tell me they ain't th' goods!" thought he. "'Nothin' you ever learn, Bill, but what may help you some time,' my poor old mother used t' say when I was a kiddo, and right she was!"

"That time I panhandled in Beantown, hung out in the Retreat on T-Wharf and got hep to the gentle art of 'jiggered' arms and phony sores—say, what I learned then is the elixir now, eh? These here eruptions take the dust-microbes from none, or I'm a preacher. They'll keep me several laps in the lead over old Tibbetts, all right, till we uncover a few oddities!"

He finished his task, once more hid the tablet and the brush, then wrapped himself in his blanket and lay down in his bunk with a low groan.

"That groan comes pretty near bein' the genuine goods," he pondered. "Fact is, the quid's beginnin' to bite. By mornin' there'll be a sick Pod in this jail, no white-powder trance about that! Well, let 'er happen. I'm ready—if Ben is!"

He snuggled the tobacco closer under his arm and composed himself to sleep.

"Gee, but I'm dizzy, now I stop to notice it!" he murmured. "There'll sure be a sick Pod by breakfast-time!"

III.

THERE was a sick Pod, very sick, actively and noisily sick. By midnight, sleep had quite abandoned him. By 2 A.M. his groans were echoing with un-simulated wo through the corridors of Ponkapog jail.

By three—though he made no demand for help—the night-watchman realized that oaths and threats and commands to "Dry up, in there, an' go t' sleep!" availed nothing. By three-thirty the warden himself, roused from slumber, was standing over Pod, a lantern in one hand and a clinical thermometer in the other.

He didn't intend to be fooled by any malingeringer, not he!

No doctor could be had at that unholy hour, save by telephoning over to Hampton Center, eight miles away, where the county pest-house was. Judson Atkins, the jail physician, was off to a convention on hospital practise, at Rutland. Warden Tibbetts therefore officiated.

"What's th' matter with ye? hey?" he demanded, prodding the sufferer.

He had no love for this fat, quizzical prisoner of his who could, on occasion, discourse freely in the most extraordinary language on rural characteristics.

"Come, speak up, thar! What's wrong?"

Pod only groaned and heaved, wrapped the blanket round his head, and breathed heavily in staccato time.

"Won't talk, you? I think ye're tryin' t' hornswoggle me, that's what I think! I've seed sech doin's afore. Cal'late this here thermometer will tell!"

He twitched the blanket from Pod's face, while the night-watchman stood behind him, holding the lantern, and thrust

the little glass tube under the lolling tongue. Pod, sick as he really was, rolled his eyes horribly and added a little quiver to the groans.

"Thar! Now we'll see!" exclaimed Tibbetts presently, withdrawing the tube. He held it close to the lantern and squinted at it, turning it this way, then that, to catch the magnification of the mercury.

"What? One hundred an' two an' a half? An' pulse runnin' like a tarnation race-horse? Je-ru-salem! Say, Jackson, I reckon as how this here man has got somethin' crossways in his gizzard. Here, gimme that light, will ye?"

He held the lantern close to Pod's distorted face, and scanned it narrowly. A whistle escaped his puckered lips. He pulled down the blanket, ripped open Pod's coarse shirt and surveyed his fat chest, a growing fear in his eyes.

"My Lord, but I—I wish—" groaned Pod.

"Wish what, you?"

"Wish I'd—(oh, my head!)—been vaccinated 'fore I ever left New York! It—*uhhh*!—run out last year, my—last vaccination did!"

Warden Tibbetts dropped his lantern, crashing, to the floor, and backed away in sudden, sickening fear.

"You—you, Jackson—you've had it a'ready, ain't ye?" he gasped.

"Sure I have!" answered the watchman, gathering up the lantern just in time to save it from going out. "Twelve years ago last fall. I—"

"All right, all right!" cried Tibbetts, retreating out of the cell. "You're th' man t' see this through, not me! I'll git a wagon. You wrap him up good an' hustle him out o' here, P.D.Q., see? Don't take him through the office. Take him out th' back way. We got t' git him over to th' Center right off quick!"

From well outside the place of dread he gave his orders in a tremulous voice. No more critical inspection for him!

"Gee, but it's lucky he's a coward, an' the light's poor!" reflected Pod, between groans.

All up and down the dark corridor bunks were creaking, cell-doors rattling, lugubrious voices asking:

"What's th' row? Somebody dyin'? Hey, Bo, put us wise."

Somebody answered: "Smallpox!" and a general gasp pervaded the night air.

"Git him out! Hurry! Hurry!" repeated Tibbetts, executing a well-covered retreat toward the office. Two minutes later he was rousing Big Jim Butts, the prison hostler, and ordering out the express-wagon.

"Oh, my, what you goin' t' do with me?" blubbered Pod. "You ain't goin' to—take me to th'—pest-house, are you?"

"Sure I be!" answered Jackson cheerfully.

"No! No!" protested the sick man with pitiable terror. "Not there! Any place but there! Oh, why can't you lemme die in peace, right here?"

"We ain't a worryin' none 'bout your dyin'," Jackson assured him, as he wrapped the extra blanket close about Pod's quivering form. "It's th' jail we're thinkin' of. Can't have that infested, y' see."

"Hev t' fumigate it now, as it is. Come on, now, set up. Git yer feet to th' floor. I'll help ye. You kin still walk a bit, can't ye?"

"Walk? Nah! Won't neither! No pest-house fer mine!"

In vain Jackson pleaded, urged, threatened, expostulated. Only when he had commandeered a trembling, panic-stricken prisoner, and with his help lugged the groaning, feebly struggling two hundred and eighty pounder by main force down the corridor and through the back entrance, did Pod Slattery leave the Ponkapog county jail.

IV.

AWAY in the chill dark of that early April morning drove the little party, headed for Hampton Center. Big Jim Butts drove the official mare. Jackson sat beside him, spitting tobacco-juice between stray bits of conversation; and in the bottom of the wagon, tightly wrapped in two thick blankets, lay the prostrate and complaining Pod.

Warden Tibbetts did not appear to see the party off. Already with panic haste he was getting out the sulfur-candles and filling the jail with strangling, choking fumes.

The village was asleep as they drove through it at a walk. The houses were all dark. No life showed itself, save a lone, barking cur, and a matutinal chanticleer or two.

Over the frozen ruts the wagon jolted, to the accompaniment of the sick man's groaning. Out of the town it passed, and, turning to the south at the signboards, headed for Hampton Center.

Jackson, had he bothered to look round, might have seen his invalid reach in under the coarse shirt, withdraw something from his arm-pit, and fling it away; but Jackson saw nothing. He was too busy with reminiscences of his own small-pox siege, twelve years ago.

By the time the wagon had traversed four miles, Pod found his health notably bettered. The absence of the poisoning quid helped him, the fresh air revived him, and a certain expectant eagerness stimulated his returning strength. He forgot, now and then, to groan.

"Sinkin', is he?" queried Big Jim Butts.

"Seems like," the watchman answered. "No matter. What th' devil do we care? We're doin' our jooty anyhow, ain't we?"

He clucked to the mare, and urged her to a lumbering trot.

Another mile passed. The road took a curve, and plunged into Babbett's Woods, on the other side of which lay Hampton.

"Dark in here, ain't it?" commented Jim, flicking his whip at an overbending spruce bough.

There came no answer, for all at once the roadside bushes crackled and in the semidusk Jackson and Butts saw a small, crouching man run with unsteady steps back into the woods, dodging from tree to tree as though to hide himself.

"I swow! What th' tarnation's that?" cried Jim, reining the mare to a standstill. "Sheep-thief, or hobo, or—"

"I dunno. Somethin' wrong abaout it, anyhow!" Jackson replied. "Hey, you!" he shouted. "Halt, there, in the name o' the law!"

The fugitive sank to earth and disappeared. In the dark undergrowth, they lost all sight of him.

"Shall we drive on?" asked Jim.

"Not by a gosh-blamed sight!" Jack-

son retorted. He was keen for laurels and promotion. "No, sirree! You wait here; I'll ketch th' cuss an' see what he's up to, anyhow."

Over the wheel he leaped, through the brushwood he crashed, and with cautious circumspection made his way toward the spot where the stranger had seemed to hide. As he went, rustling last fall's dead leaves underfoot, he called out warnings, commands, and challenges.

"Don't hurt me! Leave me be!" rose a voice from a little dell off a couple of hundred feet to the left. "I ain't done nothin' to you!"

"That's all right what you've done er ain't done," roared Jackson, suddenly emboldened by the fugitive's evident fear and weakness. "You're a s'picious character, that's what ye be. Yeou come along o' me, savvy? I arrest ye, in th' name o' the State o' Verhampshire!"

The man lay quite still, cringing and terrified. Jackson strode up to him. Big Jim, craning his neck from the wagon, could just barely make out the watchman's figure.

"Get up!" commanded Jackson, kicking him.

"Ooooh! Don't, please!" begged the man. Jackson saw that he was slight, and ragged, and in apparent pain. "'Tain't *my* fault if I'm sick an' ain't got no home nor place t' go! Lemme be!"

"Sick, be ye? Let's see! Reckon yeou'll be sicker' fore I'm through with ye!"

Jackson knelt beside the prostrate form. Something flashed. The watchman, with hair-bristling fear, found himself looking right into the round, cold mouth of a blue revolver—a mouth that seemed big as a young cannon to his terrified eyes.

"What—what—?" he stammered. The fugitive sat up and with fearful earnestness exclaimed: "Make me sicker, will you? We'll see about that! Look here, you blundering yahoo, if you want to live, you do just what I tell you, now, and do it quick, see?"

"I—I—all right—what?"

"Put your two hands out here. No, closer together. There, that's right. Now hold 'em so! Shut your eyes, tight!"

There came a click, another one. Jackson felt something cold upon his wrists.

"Bracelets!" he groaned. "Gosh a'mighty, what's up?"

The slight man with the blue revolver vouchsafed no answer. All he said was: "Now stand up against that hemlock, there. No, not that one—the other. Be quick, or—"

"All right, I will. Don't shoot, mister!"

And the erstwhile valiant one backed up with an exceeding meekness to a towering conifer. A minute later, the slight man had lashed him firmly to it with a hank of braided rope, thin rope but very strong. Then with deft speed he gagged the captive with a rough stick and some linen twine. His hands were none too tender and the twine cut Jackson's flesh, but Jackson never whimpered, for the fear of death was strong upon him.

The slight man whistled twice, a shrill note, and started toward the road.

Big Jim Butte, his suspicions well aroused that something was amiss, dropped the reins and started to clamber down from the wagon. But just as his foot touched the top of the wheel, a strange thing happened. Up from behind him rose a huge, inchoate form, vast in bulk, shedding blankets right and left. Staggering it rose, dizzy with anguish, yet terrible in determination.

Clad only in rough prison underwear, pallid, with contracted features, this apparition hurled itself on Jim, from the rear, before the driver could so much as turn. Not by dint of blows, but just with sheer impact of weight, the mighty form hurled Butts to earth, fell atop of him, then clung, crushing the very breath out of him. Jim had no wind for even a second cry of "Help!"

Help was fast coming, though not for Jim. The slight and agile man, crying: "Hold him, Pod! Hold him!" burst out of the woods into the road, and Jim Butts, too, found himself inspecting the blue muzzle of the .44.

"You can get up now," said the slight man.

"I don't know about that," Pod answered. "Dizzy? Say! My coco's doin' a merry whirl, all right. Here, Ben, give us a flipper, will you? So, that's right!"

He leaned against the wagon, panting. Jim, gasping for breath, blinked at the revolver.

"Sma—sma—smallpox! Keep away!" he managed to hiccup. "You'll—catch it!"

"Sure, I understand," Bender assented. "Get up! Peel!"

"Huh?"

"Stand up and get your clothes off, P.D.Q., or I'll make a salt-shake out of you! Got it?"

Utterly dazed, Big Jim arose.

Five minutes later, he too, wrapped in blankets, was standing in the woods, bound fast to a tree and gagged with his own handkerchief.

"We'll send somebody for you, before night!" was Bender's parting shot as he and Pod climbed into the wagon and with a sharp cut of the lash started the mare down the dusky road through the woods.

V.

BEN drove, while Pod with haste and more agility than seemed compatible with one so fat and recently so ill, clambered into the clothes of Big Jim.

"Now you take the ribbons, Pod," said Ben. And straightway he effected his disguise by simply peeling off his ragged gear and flinging it into the woods. Underneath, a clean, whole suit appeared. Ben drew a cap from his pocket, and the transformation was complete.

"Gee, Ben, but you're the nifty slickerine!" commented Pod with wonderment. "We've sure got the fun-ball circling now!"

"But not pocketed, as yet," Ben answered. "Remember, it's nine miles to the station at Rawline, and fast getting daylight. And this whole county a spider-web of rural telephones. Don't forget *that*!"

"You mean—"

"I mean that when the patient don't arrive at Hampton pest-house, as he ought to, now, inside of half an hour or so, there'll be doings. Tibbetts has notified 'em you're coming, of course. You see what's due to arrive, all right! If we romp home in the lead, it'll be no fault of *theirs*!"

"True for you. Shall we duck th' buggy and beat it on foot?"

"Forget it! I've got something down on the dope-sheet worth ten of that. Just you wait and keep the optics skinned! Say, but it worked, didn't it, eh? Oh, a pip! All fitted together like a jig-saw puzzle. Tibbetts, ha! ha!"

"Took th' hook, line, sinker, pole an' all. Scared green, too. Did a quick reverse when he saw the spots."

"Don't blame him. Slickest make-up ever. So smooth it took all curves without a jar—except to Tibb & Co. There's more show-me happenings, stamped with the hap-brand, too, dated to arrive. Just wait!"

Joyfully discussing things past, present, future, they drove on and on at the mare's best speed. Half a mile from the scene of the hold-up they passed a farmer driving in with milk to Hampton. He eyed them keenly, but did not molest them.

"Hang this dawn-stunt!" growled Pod. "If it was only midnight, now—! Why ain't I a Joshua?"

Even in the deep woods they could see that the light was growing very strong. The sun would be up, now, any time. At a little brook running beneath the road, they paused for a drink and a wash, which served the double purpose of refreshing them and removing Pod's anilin rash.

"Quick convalescence, eh?" smiled Ben, as they once more set forward and turned into a cross-road leading over the hills to Rawlins.

"Surest thing you know!" assented Pod. "Nobody could stay sick long, with your patent get-there line o' remedies."

The woods thinned out, and finally gave place to cleared land as they kept eastward. Morning had now fully come, and with it a revival of life in farmhouses and along the road. Ben urged the old mare forward. Plain to see, he chafed under the rural scrutiny. Pod, too, was anxious.

Just outside a little settlement, which straggled down a hillside, they came to an old church set far back from the road in a grove of cypress. To the left of it stood a tumble-down hearse-house. Ben drove into the yard and reined the mare to a standstill beside this structure.

"Here we are. Get out!" he remarked. "Here's the place I picked."

Pod climbed ponderously down. He and Ben forced the door, with a couple of vigorous shoves, and peered in.

"Good! Still there!" said Ben. "You unharness. I'll run it out." He seized the shafts of the old-fashioned, solid-sided vehicle.

Presently the wagon was in the hearse-house and the hearse was hitched to the official mare. They closed the door again. Nobody had seen them—so, at least, they thought.

"Now, Pod, here's the dido I haven't put you lucid to, as yet. In you go, now, quick!"

"In? In where?"

"In there!"

"What? Me, in that cold-meat cart? With not even a window to peek out of?"

"That's the program. You're dead—of smallpox—see?"

Pod spluttered protests, but Ben stood firm. "Get in, you stiff! What right's a cadaver to talk back, eh? Here, I'll help you up. So! Now remember, whatever happens, not a word out o' you, or it's all off!"

A minute later, Ben was on the seat, looking very lugubrious, and the hearse, weighted to the limit of its springs, was swaying and jolting out of the churchyard behind the somnolescent equine.

VI.

BEN turned back from the settlement, back over the hill, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the last of the church-spire with the morning sun gilding its tip. Down the first cross-road running east he turned, and urged the mare into a trot.

The hearse bounced and rocked, yawning heavily into the ruts and coming up into the wind, as it were, with a strong list as its ponderous cargo shifted. A groan, now and then, issued from the stuffy box, but Ben rapped on its top with his whip-handle, commanding silence. Farmhouses were scattered all along the road, and he could not afford to risk such a luxury on Pod's part as groaning.

They had proceeded a couple of miles, and already Ben's spirits were rising high—for the railroad now lay less than an

hour's travel ahead, and with this change of equipage all chances seemed in their favor—when a disconcerting set-back brought the frowns to the driver's keen face.

They were just passing a farm, Ben driving decorously, with hat pulled low over his eyes, when a gaunt woman appeared at the door of a wood-shed and scanned the hearse with knitted brows and hand on hip. There were telephone-wires leading into the house.

"Cy! Cy!" Ben heard her call. "Come here, quick!"

Ben kept his pose and never so much as jerked a rein, but his heart leaped. A man appeared in the doorway.

"I snum ef it ain't!" Ben heard him say, in answer to some inaudible remark of the woman's. "I'll hook up, an' see!"

"Oh, you'll see, will you?" thought Ben. He had passed, now, out of sight of the house, so he lashed the mare to a sharp trot.

"Somebody must be wise," he thought. "Somebody must have piped the game. And curse these rural telephones for gossip! Well, if we've got to do the dash, we've got to do it, that's all. Come on, there, come!" Once more the whip-lash whistled.

Ben felt that the true character of his freight was still quite unsuspected. Surely the time had been too short for the whole truth to leak; but none the less, if he were suspected merely of stealing the settlement hearse, that would bring on most fatal complications.

"Got to beat it, that's all!" said he.

Around the bends he drove at a good lick, the old hearse creaking, jolting and careering heavily. A long hill, he saw, lay before him, down into the valley at whose lower end lay Rawlins, the railroad, deliverance. He thanked his stars for the long hill. That would speed him half a mile or more on his way. Vigorously he laid on the whip; the old mare kicked up her heels and hit the grit in earnest.

And now the hearse lunged into a mad career. Loose rocks and gravel flew, dust rose in the morning sunlight, springs complained and loose spokes rattled.

Every "thank-you-ma'am" sent the crazy rattletrap bounding into air, to

come down a-slew and right itself with wild, eccentric gyrations.

The pace quickened. The old hearse, freighted as never before, hurled itself down the hill, devouring space, faster and faster as it neared the bottom.

Ben, laughing aloud, laying on the whip where it would do the most good, glanced back. His laughter ceased, and a strong word filled his mouth. Behind him, just topping the hill some half a mile in the rear, plainly visible against the sky-line, he caught sight of a pursuing wagon. He saw the driver's arm rise, fall, and knew the rod was nowise being spared.

"Go it, Cresceus!" he shouted to the now terrified mare, and rained down blows.

The hearse struck a hummock. Something went *Smash!* and shrill cries rang out—wild, inarticulate cries. Ben, hauling vainly on the ribbons, looked round. He saw the roadway strewn with boards, scatter.

"Good Lord! The bottom's out!" he cried. "Pod's running, in the hearse!"

Then, as he looked, a huge and rotund figure fell astern, rolled, ricocheted, sprawled, bounced, and came to rest. It struggled up and lunged into a staggering run after the fleeing equipage, with wild yells, dusty, disheveled.

"Whoa, Emma! Whoa!" roared Ben, jerking the reins savagely. The mare obeyed. Slower and slower the hearse went, then stopped still.

Ben jumped from the seat and ran back.

"Hurt?" he cried.

"Hurt, nothin'! But say—what—"

"Cut the questions, Pod! They're after us! We've got to make a diversion of some sort, and hike across-lots! Hear that?"

He held up a warning finger. Pod listened, panting. Far up the hill, out of sight around its sweep, came a rattle of loose stones.

"Yaps coming! Be here in three minutes! Quick, that hay!"

Ben pointed at a lop-sided old haystack by the roadside.

"Quick! Stuff the hearse!"

Without waiting for explanations, he dived for the stack and came back with

a heaping armful. Pod, questioning not, imitated him. Into the hearse they crammed it. Enough bottom-boards remained to hold it in its place.

"Now, a match! Hurry! Hurry!"

The match went *Fsss!* Ben thrust it into the hay. A tiny flame leaped up, then thickened and threw out yellow smoke.

"All right, let 'er go!" cried Ben. "Duck for the woods!"

He gave the mare a fierce, final cut of the lash.

"Get up! Go on there, you!" he shouted, and kicked her in the ribs. She, terrified beyond all measure, leaped into a wild run.

Flaming like a meteor, with a long, dense trail of smoke streaming behind, the blazing apparition hurled itself into the valley.

"Down! Down!" cried Bender, seizing Pod and hauling him behind a tangled growth of birch and hardhack.

Barely hidden from sight of the road, they heard the dash and rattle of their pursuer's wagon. Then came another, and a third. Profane, astonished yells rose on the air.

"Hell's loose! Thar goes—th' fust load—naow!" a high-pitched nasal voice shouted in mingled fear and amaze.

Quite still lay Pod and Ben. No more wagons passed. Gradually peace descended on the spring landscape.

"Come on, Bo, let's beat it for the uncut!" chuckled Pod, at length.

"Right-o. I'm with you!" answered Ben.

They got cautiously to their feet and started for the woods which lay a quarter of a mile back of the road.

"That'll hold 'em for an hour or two, that Hell-buggy will," grinned the ex-invalid.

"Longer than that," Ben opined, "or I don't know the Jay psychology. And by that time, let 'em find us—if they can!"

"There's other stations besides Rawlins, and other south-bound night freights besides the one that stops there. Give us a freight and the two phony-cards I've got in my pocket, and—"

"And it's Broadway for ours, a one best bet!" exclaimed the radiant Pod as they disappeared into the sheltering forest.

THE WORKINGMAN'S SONG.

By John Stuart Blackie.

I AM no gentleman, not I!
No bowing, scraping thing!
I bear my head more free and high
Than titled count or king.
I am no gentleman, not I!
No, no, no!
And only to one Lord on high
My head I bow.

I am no gentleman, not I!
No bully, braggart thing!
With jockeys on the course to vie,
With bulldogs in the ring.
I am no gentleman, not I!
No, no, no!
The working man might sooner die
Than sink so low.

I am no gentleman, not I!
No star-bedizened thing!
My fathers filched no dignity,
By fawning on a king.
I am no gentleman, not I!
No, no, no!
And to the wage of honesty
My rank I owe.

THE YELLOW SARD.*

By Sidney Fredericks.

A tale of love and mystery, and of a night of terror
in Tangier.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

INTO the midst of a Moroccan political intrigue, Elise Dexter and John Burroughs, American travelers, are precipitated by the girl's purchasing in Tangier a yellow sard ring. The two are separated; Elise is captured and locked up by some Moors, and Burroughs is carried off by two Frenchmen, Savary and Dupré, to a house, where he is accused of murdering one Bompard, and is searched for the ring and "papers." Dupré gets the ring from him, but a scuffle ensues, in which it is supposed both Frenchmen are killed. Suddenly a woman appears in a doorway. Explanations ensue. She says that she is Simone, a Frenchwoman, interested in the intrigue; that the ring belongs to Muley-Hafid, the rightful Sultan of Morocco, and bids Burroughs take her to the shop where it was bought. In the journey they get into a brawl and Burroughs is wounded in the shoulder, so that they repair to Simone's house to rest. There comes Savary, recovered. Burroughs hides, while Savary, still accusing him of stealing the "papers" and the ring, and of killing Bompard, shakes dice with Simone for the American's life. He wins, but the American has gone. From the window hangs a rope made of bedclothes.

Meanwhile, Elise has escaped from the Moors, only to fall into the clutches of a Jew, who appears to know something about the ring. He takes her first to Savary's house to hunt for it; then, disappointed, they go to his. He exerts some sort of hypnotic power over the girl, and she, after writing a letter asking to be ransomed, stays in his house.

Burroughs is nearly recaptured by Savary, but again saved by Simone, who locks up the Frenchman in a closet. She and Burroughs then go in search of Elise and the "papers."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHO KILLED BOMPARD?

THE match dropped from Burroughs's fingers, and he stood glaring through the darkness at Simone.

"He has tricked you," he chided. "You should have been sure. What are we going to do now?"

"Go to his own house," she answered.

"You know where that is?"

"I told you that I knew all the underworld of Tangier. If the Jew had known who was following him, he might have spared himself some trouble or have given me more."

"But suppose he is not at his house?"

"We can try."

"Is it far?"

"In this street. He was nearly home before he tried this trick."

They hurried out, and in a little while

they stood before the same door which, an hour previous, Elise and the Jew had entered.

"You're sure this is the place?"

"Yes, this is it. Are you afraid?"

Burroughs looked up at the blank walls of the house, as if to question them of their secrets. "The only fear that amounts to anything is the kind that makes you turn back," he answered, and put his hand to the door.

It was fastened from the inside.

"And now what?" he queried. "Are we going to call him out, or break in?"

Simone hesitated.

"Jean," she said, "he is a dangerous man. I am afraid of him. But we will stand together, whatever happens?"

"Yes," jerked out Burroughs, "whatever happens. We don't believe much in evil eyes in my town; and I don't think he'll have a chance to exert it, if I get my hands on him first."

*Began April All-Story Magazine. Single copies, 10 cents.

"But you must not kill him—that is, not until he has told where the letters are," she added naively.

"What happens to him will depend on what has happened to Miss Dexter."

"But you are going to help me get the letters?"

"To the last ditch," said Burroughs. Simone lifted her hand and knocked. No answer.

Then Burroughs applied his knuckles, and they could hear the raps echoing from the hollow place within. Still there was no answer.

"You're sure this is the place?" the young man asked for the third time.

"Yes, yes."

His response to this was to lay his shoulder to the door.

"You will frighten them, and they will escape by the roof."

"They are already warned," he exclaimed excitedly, and, stepping back, hurled his body against the cedar planks.

The result was the pop of a broken fastening, and the two rushed in. Through the dark little courtyard they hurried up the stairs to a room where a candle burned. The flame flickered to the draft made by their entrance; but it was the only moving thing present.

Burroughs snatched the candle from its socket, and, holding it high above his head with one hand, while he grasped his cocked revolver in the other, he started to search the house. Simone followed closely.

In the previous happenings of the evening she had taken the initiative, but now she showed her willingness to let the man lead.

They entered room after room. All were empty; and Burroughs pressed on to the housetop. As he mounted the steps, a puff of air blew out the flame. He did not stop to rekindle it; and when he reached the roof, there was no need. Light was already provided.

A three-weeks'-old moon had lifted its scarred face above the horizon; everything about was clearly discernible. There was no sign of a fugitive.

The artist ran across the roof to the nearest parapet and sent his glance searching in all directions. Everything was quiet.

As he stood looking, conscious of the

fact that the girl he sought was not there, he gradually lost the idea of the search and the picture itself gripped him.

This was a new world of Tangier. The whole of the place seemed sprinkled with powdered silver, while here and there were tints borrowed from the pearl shell and the turquoise. Not far away a minaret lifted a pale blue filament of shadow against the silver light.

Far down he could hear the drone of the sea, and could detect the faint white sparkle of the waves as they came in to beat murmuringly against the sea-wall. In the air above he saw the moving shadow of a night-bird, and a light, tinkling note dropped out of the heavens. He breathed deeply, and the air was tonic to his lungs; it braced and steadied him. He stretched his arms, and found that his shoulder no longer pained him.

The sense of beauty touched him only for a moment. He jumped down and hurried back to where Simone stood.

"We have lost them, if they were ever here," he said despairingly.

"We can search the house. Perhaps I can find the letters."

He snapped his fingers impatiently. He did not care for the letters; he wanted to see Elise, to know the truth about her, for now that he had some trace of her, his fears were graver than before. There was nothing to do, however, but to follow the Frenchwoman down into the dark house, where he relit the candle and handed it to her.

She looked about the place carefully, and then pronounced decidedly: "Yes, this is his house. I know that cloak hanging there. I have seen him wear it."

With that she began to examine the clothes that hung on the wall, while Burroughs stood still in the middle of the room, watching. She went through the garments, turned over bedding, opened the drawers of the table, looked everywhere for the letters. Finally she turned to him with her hands spread wide in perplexity.

"No use."

"What's to do?"

"We can wait for them. They must come back."

"Wait," snapped the artist. "And while we are waiting the world may blow up. I'm going down."

"But what good will that do? Where will you go?"

"Anywhere to try to find them—to lay the matter before the authorities."

He bolted out of the room, and the woman followed close.

They were at the outer door again, and had halted for a second to decide which way to go, when Simone pointed down the street.

"*Sst!*" she warned. "Some one is coming. It may be the Jew."

A moment later a man's form swung out of the shadows.

"It is he," she whispered. "Careful, we must let him get in."

They stumbled back through the passage and, shrinking against the wall, waited the man's entrance. He paused a long time at the outer door, apparently suspicious because he found it open.

Then they heard him moving cautiously toward the stairs. Fortunately, his desire to reconnoiter was in their favor, for he did not use his hand-lamp. His garments almost brushed them as he crept past, and Burroughs fully expected that he would give himself away by his breathing.

The Jew's senses, however, were all centered on the rooms above, where he expected trouble, if there was any. The two stalked him more silently than he went himself; and when he entered the candle-lit room, they paused at the doorway, watching.

The absence of Elise and his wife roused immediate suspicion. He stopped abruptly, his head lifted, his black eyes searching around him.

"Irene," he called softly.

Burroughs, his eye to the opening between the curtains, felt the woman beside him shudder; her hand groped at his side till she found his, and she nestled her own within it like a child asking for protection.

She was afraid of the mysterious evil eye, and for a second her fear was communicated to her companion. He realized that they were about to face an unknown danger.

It was one thing to laugh at evil eyes as long as you felt yourself a good American and were in a region where the laws of the West held good. This was another world; so, for a second, his doubt

came back as her cold fingers slid into his and he felt her body pressing him close.

He had had the fear before, and had conquered it. This was no time for hesitation; he must act. And the next thought—that this man knew where Elise was—sent the courage rolling back through his veins like new blood.

"Irene!" the Jew called again, and started across the room.

"Stay here," counseled Burroughs, and stepped out to confront the man.

As the latter looked into the nose of a thirty-eight, he jumped back with a cry of astonishment.

"Shut up!" said the young man roughly; and then in French he added: "Hold up your hands!"

The Jew hesitated for the click of a clock. Then his hands came slowly up above his head, and a smile curled at his thin lips. The craftiness of the smile somehow put Burroughs in a panic.

He had been forcing himself to an attitude that he was not quite sure of; and as soon as he felt the man's hard and compelling gaze on him, the memory of Simone's fears regarding the duel they were entering on began to play havoc with his nerve. He dared not shift his eyes from his opponent lest the latter leap at him or draw a weapon.

And now the Jew's hands, with their long, tapering fingers, began to move downward as if they were to be extended above the American's head in an attitude of benediction. But it was no blessing that the man pronounced.

He put one foot forward and leaned slightly toward his victim; he thrust his face near him till he seemed to envelop the other's personality by his own.

"You can't shoot," he announced in very clear English. "Put down that pistol!"

It was just what Burroughs had expected, and he had thought he was ready for it, but the man's will was stronger than his own. He tried to pull the trigger, but even as he made the effort he knew that he would fail.

He set his teeth and fought the influence. The Jew advanced one step and spoke the words again in a low tone of command. Slowly Burroughs lowered the revolver.

The other's tense face relaxed to an evil grin. It faded as Simone's voice cut the silence. She had gone round by the little gallery and come upon the man in the rear. She had him covered with her revolver, but her voice quavered a little as she cried:

"Stop!"

The Jew spun round like a flash, and his hand went to his breast for a weapon.

"Hold up your hands or I'll shoot!" she ordered.

The Jew laughed.

"You can't!" he snapped, shifting his position one step so that by a slight turn of the head he could face either of his adversaries.

Burroughs caught his breath with a half-sob as the man's eyes left him. It was as if a weight had been taken from his brain. His own will again came within calling distance.

As for the Jew, he was between two fires and was making the extraordinary attempt to control two people at once. He turned again to the American, and once more Simone's voice warned him. Her tone was not so imperative as at first; still, it was a command.

"If you do not sit down and cover your face, I will shoot. I will give you three."

The evil eyes caught hers. Burroughs felt his own freedom increase. He was beginning to understand. The Jew was nothing but a good hypnotist, whom superstition had invested with miraculous powers. He might control one subject, but the American did not believe he could manage two.

The instant he told himself that, his own will got dominion. Anger, white-hot anger against the man who was playing with him, blazed in his veins. He saw the Jew's hand lifted toward Simone with its gentle, wave-like motion. He jumped toward him.

The Jew saw the movement and faced about; a knife glittered in his hand; but he was too late to avoid the American's long swing. The latter's fist landed squarely on the point of the hypnotist's jaw and he tumbled in a sorry heap on the floor.

"Don't kill him," called Simone.

"He won't give any more trouble,"

announced Burroughs with the cheerful certitude of one who has gained a point and sees himself master. "Give me that piece of cloth."

He knelt over the half-conscious man and pinioned his arms, while Simone ran out to the gallery and returned with a water-bottle, from which she sprinkled a few drops on the Jew's face. He sniffed and opened his eyes as Burroughs picked him up bodily and deposited him on the dirty divan.

"Now, my friend," said the artist, "we'll have no more of this darned nonsense. You'll please keep your eyes on the floor, and if you try any more of this evil-eye business, I'll break your jaw next time."

The Jew glanced under his brows at the two who were covering him with their revolvers from opposite sides of the room. He groveled. He was caught and conquered. The weapon he had always found so effective had failed him, and he was without resource, for, physically, he was a coward.

"What have I done?" he whined.

"Where is the American girl who was with you to-night?"

"I left her here. Have you not found her?"

"I was protecting her. Perhaps she has gone back to her friends. I would have taken her back to-morrow. It was not safe for a foreign woman to be alone at night where I found her, so I brought her home. I did not harm her."

"Where are the letters?" cut in Simone.

The Jew looked dazed.

"I do not know what you mean. She had no letters."

"Don't lie," she said. "I am not talking of what she had."

Sweeping across the room she thrust her hand into his mantle. Her whole attitude toward him had changed. She had seen him conquered and she no longer had any fear.

Ever since she had seen the Jew in Savary's house, she had hesitated in her quest, allowing Burroughs to take the lead. Now she resumed her old air of command. She gave no heed to his protests, but searched him thoroughly, even making him take off his shoes and running her knife between the soles to make

sure that there was nothing concealed there.

Her search was unrewarded. Not a scrap of paper was brought to light. At one moment it almost seemed that she was going to strike the man in her disappointment.

"What have you done with them?" she demanded. "Have you sold them already, or have you hidden them?"

"I swear by the beard of Abraham that I took nothing from the young lady. I found her in the hands of some Moors, and I rescued her."

"Then why is she not here?" interposed Burroughs.

"Perhaps she has escaped. I do not know. But I took nothing from her."

"Don't try to deceive me," went on Simone. "I am not talking of anything you took from the young lady. I am talking of the letters to Muley-Hafid. If you have hidden them and will give them up, I will pay you, and I promise to let you go free."

The man uttered another protestation.

"But I do not know what you mean. I swear again that I have no letters."

"The evidence is too strong against you. Look at this." She stepped up to him and thrust the yellow sard in his face.

His jaw fell.

"Then you have it? But it is not mine. I am not a spy of Muley's."

"You do not deny that you sold the ring to a goldsmith within the last twenty-four hours?"

"But it was not mine. I did not know what it was. I came on it by—by accident."

Simone smiled. Her theory was proving true.

"I thought so. You stole it, and, for some reason, sold it. But you were so anxious to get it back that you went to the house of Savary, the Frenchman, and searched a man's body for it."

"Then it was you whom I sensed there," he exclaimed. "It was you who followed us."

"And now will you deny that it was you who murdered Bompard, the other Frenchman, and who stole his watch and his ring and the letter?"

"Then there were letters taken?" he asked, with sudden craftiness.

"If you deny it again—" she menaced.

"But it was not I who took them," he protested. "It was not I who murdered him. Wait," he cried, as Simone made a threatening move toward him—"wait! I did steal the ring and the watch. I confess. I did not know the value of the ring, and I sold it. Then I found out by accident, and I tried to get it back to sell again to those who could use it. That was why I went to Savary's house. But the letters! I know nothing of letters. The man who did the murder must have them."

"And you were the man. Who else could be guilty?"

"The man from whom I took the ring and the watch, perhaps."

"But you took them from Bompard."

"No, not from Bompard, though I knew him."

"From whom, then? If you lie, it will go hard with you. From whom?"

"From the wall-eyed Frenchman, Alphonse Savary."

CHAPTER XIV.

WHICH KILLED BOMPARD?

If the Jew had let off a bomb he could not have created more consternation than he did by his words.

Simone turned quickly to Burroughs, but the latter laughed.

"See here, my friend," he said, "let's have done with this nonsense."

"I am telling the truth," shrilled the man. "I know nothing of the murder of Bompard, nor of his letters. The ring and the watch and a little money I had from Savary. Find him and ask him where he got the ring."

Burroughs was about to speak, but Simone stopped him by a gesture.

"Wait. Let us hear your story," she said to the Jew. "But be quick."

"I got them from Savary."

"The whole story."

Burroughs stood impatiently while the Jew continued in Arabic:

"It was last night. I was in a café, watching the dancing-girls. I sat near the platform, for the place was crowded. There were plenty of Moors, and there were a few foreigners whose guides had

brought them. There was good dancing. Racma, the desert girl, was there, and the Jewess from Fez. It was good dancing.

"Late—very late—a man came in and shouldered up toward the platform. He wore a red fez, and his burnoose was drawn over his face; but I saw his bad eye, and I knew Savary. He had been drinking, and was not himself. He sat very close to me, and he seemed to be thinking of something besides the dancing, for his eyes were far away. At last he went out, and I followed him to his house; and when he slept, I entered, for I knew he was in liquor and would not be dangerous.

"I got the watch and the ring. He had laid them on the table. The ring was made for a large man, and I think it did not fit him, so he could not wear it. But I could not find his money. It was concealed in his shirt.

"In the morning I sold the ring, and later, when I went to sell the watch, I found out what the ring was. I did not know before. I conceived the idea of getting it back. If it belonged to Muley-Hafid, it was worth money. I found the English girl. She had been seized by spies, who were keeping her for a reward. I rescued her and brought her here. To-morrow I would have taken her back to her friends."

Burroughs stood eying the two while the man spoke; he chafed at the delay.

"It is true," protested the Jew. "If the ring was Bompard's, ask Savary how he got it."

Simone ruminated for a minute. Then, blowing out her breath with a sharp puff, she rapidly translated the story to her companion.

"I wonder," she finished musingly. "It is a strange tale."

"He is simply trying to trick us," objected Burroughs.

"I wonder."

"But if Savary had the ring, why did he pretend to think it was taken from Bompard?"

"What if Savary took it himself?"

"But—"

"What if he killed him?"

"He has been hot on my trail, because he says I killed him."

"Perhaps to draw suspicion from himself."

Burroughs whistled.

"I can see that it is not impossible. He did not like Bompard." Her lashes dropped languidly, and a slight smile came to her red lips. "He was jealous. I knew that, but I did not think it had gone that far. Perhaps it is true."

For a while she seemed to forget the Jew, as she went back in her brain, putting things together that would sustain the new hypothesis that had suddenly upset all their plans.

"Yes," she said finally, "it is possible that he killed Bompard and took the ring and the letters to make it appear that robbery was the motive."

"But what was he going to do with the ring and the letters? They would be of no use to him alone. And if he merely wanted to show robbery, he would have taken only the watch and the money. Then his tracks would have been covered, and he could have gone on and worked with the rest of you in carrying out the plot. There must be some other reason behind his keeping the letters—if he has them, which I doubt."

"Perhaps he meant to play traitor."

"But why?"

"To spite me and for the money. Abdel-Aziz would pay a price for the letters, for to have them miscarry would upset all the Pretender's plans."

"If you want to know what I think about it," said Burroughs, "it is that this man here is lying in order to save his own mutton. It is easy to lay it on Savary when he isn't here."

"We must confront them with each other. If Savary has the letters, we have Savary."

"How if he has already disposed of them?"

She clapped her hands with a sudden inspiration. "He hasn't," she averred decidedly. "Don't you see? He intended to sell them yesterday, but the theft of the ring balked him. He needed both to make a good bargain. That was why he kidnaped you. And, having got the ring, he persisted about the letters in order to hoodwink Dupré. Then came your fight in his room, and he was still without the letters."

"It seems impossible."

"And we must prove its possibility. We must go to Savary."

Burroughs came back to his own quest. "But the American girl," he urged—"where is she?"

"I left her here with my wife."

"But you have an idea where she is gone."

"I do not know, but I can search for her. If you will let me go, I will find her."

"Very good," said Burroughs. "I'll go with you."

The Jew smiled.

"Yes," he said, "if the gentleman will go with me, I will find her."

Simone interrupted:

"Not alone, Jean. You shall not go with him alone. He will trick you. You would never come back alive. There must be some other way. Come with me to get the letters from Savary and then we will think what to do."

"And in the meantime she will be lost."

"But it is suicide to follow him, and even if we went together, he could lead us into a trap as easy as a hunter baits a boar."

Burroughs glimpsed the Jew's sly look, and he knew the truth of the statement. He knew that he didn't want to be alone with that man. It gave him the creeps, as he recalled his helplessness when the Jew had stood before him and waved his hand.

"You must not trust him," pleaded Simone. "Go with me to confront Savary, and then you can go back to the pasha and raise the alarm. It is the only way. Look! I am thinking only of you when I ask it. Go with me this last time, Jean, and then go back to your own people. Go with me."

She leaned toward him, and her bare white arm, shaking free its loose sleeve, went to his neck. For the second time that night her lips were close to his, and her attitude was of invitation.

And Burroughs knew that she was playing on his senses. He knew that, despite her words, she still hoped to win the look that she wanted. And he knew, too, that, in spite of his saner instincts, the love of this woman thrilled and called to him.

He forgot the captive Jew. He knew only that Simone Colet was

breathing near him, and that her tropic beauty was working on his pulses as the smoldering fire of wine.

In another instant their lips would have touched, but the cry of a woman—a half sob—came to him from the outer gallery.

The Jew stiffened on his mattress. Simone whirled like a machine. Burroughs stood erect and listened.

There was no further sound.

Then both Simone and Burroughs bounded toward the door and drew back the curtain. Another woman's cry echoed in the darkness, and there was the swish of moving drapery.

Without stopping to think, Burroughs dashed in its direction. As he bounded down the stairs, he was aware of a figure flying before him. They reached the court; the form, moving like a ghost in the darkness, was ten paces ahead. It plunged into the passage and reached the outer door, which was swinging ajar. Just the second required to pull it wide open was the second the pursuer needed. He seized a woman's mantle, and the wearer turned and struck him in the face with her hand.

Before she could repeat the blow, he had pinioned both her arms and was carrying her back to the light. In the room where Simone and the Jew were waiting he set down the captive.

It was the Jewess who had been left in charge of Elise.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT HAPPENED TO ELISE.

ELISE DEXTER did not know how long she had lain on the uninviting bed in the Jew's house, when a light hand laid across her eyes roused her to full consciousness. She sat up to find the woman standing over her with a candle in her hand and a finger on her lip to caution the girl against any outcry.

Motioning the latter to follow, the woman blew out the light and, guiding Elise by the arm, led her out onto the gallery. As they emerged, Elise heard a noise below at the street-door. Some one was trying to make an entrance—some one, apparently, not of the house

—for she could hear them rapping insistently, and rattling the door.

She was too dazed, still too much under the influence of the Jew, to care to inquire who it might be. With the utmost docility she allowed the other to lead her up into the white silence of the roofs.

They heard the faint crash as the door gave in.

Then came the sound of hurried feet in the rooms below, and the two women fled over their own roof to the next. The parapet which separated them was about four feet high, but the Jewish woman scaled it with an agility born of practise, and giving a hand to Elise, helped her up. They dropped to the other side and ran across to the next wall. Before they could clamber over they heard some one pursuing.

At the moment when Burroughs was standing erect on the parapet, looking out over the roofs in search of them, the women were crouching in the shadow of the wall opposite, and in full view of him. But their white garments were blue in that light, and mingled so nicely with the shadows that they were perfectly concealed.

They saw the man's tall figure outlined against the sky; they watched him breathlessly as he slowly pivoted round, surveying every point within range. His Moorish dress and his cowed head effectively disguised him.

To Elise, he was merely one of the race whose hand had been against her almost from the moment she set foot on the continent. She shivered in silence while he stood there, and drew a relieved breath when he finally got down on the side opposite them.

For nearly half an hour they remained in the shadow. Twice Elise essayed a question in English and French. Each time she was met by a curt sentence in Arabic, and in return could only answer dully:

"I don't understand. *Je ne comprends pas.*" So, for the most part, they sat in silence.

At last, however, the woman stirred, rose to her feet, glided across the roof, and pulled herself up so that she could look over the parapet. What she saw, or didn't see, was apparently satisfac-

tory, for, returning, she tugged at Elise's arm to indicate that they were to go back.

They scaled the wall again, and, with the woman ahead, approached the stairs leading down into the house. For a while they listened, but no sound came from the depths. The Jewess now pushed Elise ahead of her, and they cautiously descended. Just as they reached the foot of the stairs, the silence was broken by voices.

Something in the quality of one of them gave the American girl's dulled senses a jog. It seemed familiar. Till then under the influence of the Jew, this new sound served to bring her back to her real self; her consciousness pricked up its ears, so to speak.

She threw off the restraining hand of the woman and rushed forward. A light shining behind curtains that separated her from the place of voices drew her toward them. With trembling fingers she parted the hangings, hoping that she would see a friendly face. She was disappointed. The light in the room was dim; but the picture she saw, instead of reassuring her, made her afraid.

The odious Jew was there as its center. He was lounging on a divan. On the other side of the room, his back toward the watcher, a tall Moor was holding a woman in his arms. At the second that Elise looked all were silent, but the girl could see the quiet smile of the Jew, the speaking eyes and voluptuous lips of the woman. Neither face gave her confidence or suggested any use of appeal.

They were enemies.

With a sob of disappointment she turned away. This time she did not go roofward. The accident had wrenched her loose from the will of the Jewish woman. This latter was behind her, waiting doubtfully, and Elise saw the way open to the street. Without stopping to consider anything except that possible escape lay in that direction, she made for the stairs.

She realized that the woman was following her, that the persons she had seen in the room were also in pursuit, and this lent wings to her feet. She reached the outer door and plunged through with-

out being overtaken. She heard the woman's cry and a slight scuffle, and she expected that in a moment four or five people would burst from the door and be at her heels.

Nothing of the sort happened.

Looking over her shoulder as she drew away from the house, she could detect no one. Something had occurred inside to cut off pursuit. She did not know what; and, as soon as she was sure they were not coming, she did not care.

It was enough that she was free from the evil atmosphere of that house.

But though she was free bodily, she had no real feeling of freedom. Twice before that night she had escaped from the clutches of those who sought to detain her, and each time her high hopes had been dashed to the ground. She was prepared for something to occur to thwart her now.

In the small hours of the night when the fires of life burn low, her brain was a fit field for superstitious fancies. She believed that she was under some fatal influence of the yellow sard. It would have taken more than a course of lectures to have convinced her that some mysterious force was not working against her.

Thus, with something of the attitude of a fatalist, she hurried away from the house. If it was meant that she should get away, doubtless she would. If it was fated that she be retaken, she would not be surprised.

The night, though clear, was exceedingly raw, and her long time crouching and cramped position on the housetops had numbed her. She had lost her cloak in the flight, and the light gray jacket gave her little protection.

As soon as she was positive she was not followed, she paused to form some plan for finding her way out of the tangle. She must attempt to go in some general direction and trust to luck to come out at a familiar spot. Finally, she decided to go down hill, for going up or down was the only way she had of orienting herself.

The streets were not as they were when she had traveled them with the Jew. She no longer met gliding, ghostly figures; no longer heard occasional

scraps of conversation from doorways. It was as if she were in a city of the dead.

The houses loomed blue-white like sepulchers, and no man could tell what they hid. Narrow, arched alleys yawned at her like the black mouths of catacombs.

Presently she came out into a small, open square or market-place. It resembled the one she had crossed with the Jew, but she could not be sure. She was breathless and thirsty, however, so she went over to the well-place with the idea of getting a drink of water. There was no vessel by for obtaining it, and she sank down on the stones to rest for a moment before continuing her walk.

The loneliness was oppressive, and she began again to think of home.

She had complained, sometimes, that life in Ohio was dull. If she ever got back there, there would be no more complaint. She would be willing to take her adventure in the homeopathic dose of the picnic or coasting-party. What would her girl chums think if they knew that she was fleeing alone through the streets of Tangier at dead of night?

What would her mother, reposing peacefully in a hotel at Gibraltar, do if she could see her daughter now? What was Mrs. Ragsdale doing that she had not already set on foot means for finding the lost ones?

This thought was brightening. Surely Mrs. Ragsdale had done something as soon as their absence had been remarked. Surely, men were out now looking for some trace of her. As if in answer to her thought, four figures appeared at the mouth of a street.

They came without warning, and they were plainly on some errand of haste; for, a moment after she discovered them, they were half-way across the square. There were three tall men wearing fezes; the fourth, who was a little in advance, was bareheaded. They walked swiftly and noiselessly; they carried an air of authority.

A wind of hope caught the girl in its grasp.

On the impulse she got to her feet and ran toward them, calling out. They stopped instantly, and with stumbling French, she went up to them. One of

the men stepped out to meet her, holding up a lantern. He held it up to her face and started back with an exclamation of wonder.

With a sinking heart Elise recognized him as one of the same men who had taken her from the greasy fritter-shop. She sought to turn back, but he laughed gutturally and caught hold of her.

The other faces, as they came within range of the light, were strange. One, the man who was guiding the others, was a giant negro.

They conferred for a moment.

Then the man who knew her, took her by the arm, and they started off again in the direction they had been going.

CHAPTER XVI.

SAVARY PLAYS AN ACE.

THREE pairs of eyes were turned curiously on the woman whom Burroughs had captured. The Jew's conveyed to her a message which the others did not catch.

Simone spoke in Arabic.

"Your wife?" she asked.

The Jew nodded.

"Where is the American girl?"

The woman spread her hands.

"Gone," she answered. "She has gone to find her people. She did not wish to stay. And I did not detain her against her will. I was protecting her."

"How long gone?"

A shrug of the shoulders.

"Oh, quite long."

"She went alone?"

"Yes."

Simone explained to Burroughs, who stamped with vexation.

"Everything seems against us. It's no use wasting time here. I'm going after her and to raise an alarm. The streets are not safe, even if she is free, and I don't half believe this woman."

"We will all go," said Simone. "I must go back to my house to find Savary."

The Jew addressed her servilely.

"You will unbind me and let me go, since I have proved my innocence?"

Simone smiled ironically.

"I shall take you both with me to confront the man with the wall-eye."

"Not my wife?"

"Both. Do you think I will let you go, now that I have my hands on you?"

Burroughs put his hand to his head wearily. "I think it's all lies," he said.

"We will soon see. If you are going to search the streets, you may as well go in my direction as another. And if you will wait till I have got the truth from Savary, I will help you."

Burroughs strode over to the Jew and jerked him to his feet.

"Now, no monkey business," he ordered. "If you try one little small trick, I'll break your head. We are going to see whether you are the greatest liar in Morocco or whether Savary is the greatest knave."

At a signal from Simone, who was still holding her weapon in readiness, the Jewess started also, and a little later they all emerged from the house. On the way through the street the artist was watchful, but there was no sign of Elise.

Before Simone's door Burroughs stopped.

"Jean," said the Frenchwoman, "help me in this. I am afraid to be alone with these people. It will take only a little while to find what Savary knows, and then—I will help you search."

"You cannot search alone. And, believe me, you would get little assistance from the Pasha. They care nothing for Europeans. We can do better without them. Let me give you a maxim—one thief can do more toward catching a thief than six officials."

Burroughs realized the truth of what she said.

"You promise to help me find her?"

"Yes."

So Burroughs followed the three into the house.

When they entered, Savary, in the lock-fast room, knocked heavily upon the door.

"Here I am," he called stentorically. "Here!"

Simone glided over and threw it open.

"Yes, we know you're there," she said cuttingly.

"Ah, it's you, is it?" he growled; and then, his eyes taking in the rest of the party, he scrutinized each sharply. A puzzled look came into his face.

"Whom did you expect?" asked the

Frenchwoman. "Did you think you had tricked us for good?"

He grinned.

"Trick you? I had no hope of tricking you. You are too clever," he retorted sarcastically.

"You will laugh on the other side of your face presently," she assured him. "Sit down!"

"I am in your power now. But he laughs best who laughs last—as I have remarked before."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean nothing. I merely philosophize. It is the privilege of the under dog."

Though Simone shrugged her shoulders, the man's impudence and *sang-froid* made Burroughs uneasy. Who was really going to laugh last in this business? he asked himself. And would he have an opportunity to laugh at all? Simone might laugh or Savary, but perhaps he himself was destined to hold the bag for both.

Burroughs was standing near the door to guard the exit, while the Jew and his wife squatted on the floor; and Savary, who had seated himself nonchalantly in one of the great chairs, eyed these two with surprise in his face. With a wave of his maimed hand, he indicated them to Simone.

"And what have our friends here to do with it?" he questioned.

"He is the man who stole the ring."

"Ah!" Savary started and his bad eye rolled excitedly as he bent toward the Jew.

"Yes," went on Simone calmly. "It was he who sold Bompard's watch and ring. Therefore, he must have done the murder, or have got them from the man who did."

"Ah!" said Savary again, throwing himself back in his chair with an air of indifference. "He looks like a murderer."

"I am not sure that I can trust your judgment; you once accused the American."

"Doubtless one is as bad as the other," said Savary airily.

"Fortunately, I don't have to depend on your instincts. I know who did the murder."

She was standing directly in front of

Savary, and she spoke this last with an insinuation of tone that made the wall-eyed man twist in his chair.

"He was near by when the act was committed, and he knows the man," she concluded.

The Frenchman's lean body again swung forward toward the Jew, and he glared at him.

"You were a fool to be jealous of Bompard," she went at him again. "You were a bigger fool to let your jealousy carry you so far."

Savary let out a flood of oaths that, had they been in English, would have staggered even Burroughs. But profanity in a foreign language is usually amusing instead of offensive.

Simone ignored his interruption.

"He saw you," she went on monotonously, "saw you kill Bompard, and then—"

"He did not," said Savary furiously.

"Easy," quieted the woman. "You know you were jealous of Bompard."

"He got what was coming to him," sulked the Frenchman. "As for you," he exclaimed, scowling at the Jew, "look out for yourself!"

"I was not there," protested the accused one fearfully. "I did not say I saw you."

"But you took the ring and the watch from me that night."

Simone laughed.

"Then you did do it," she charged. "You killed Bompard, and you took the ring and the watch and the letters to make us believe that it was robbery. I know it as well as if I had been there."

A gleam of rage swept across the Frenchman's face as his eyes met hers. He opened his lips to speak, but caught himself.

"Well," pressed the woman, "what have you to say? If you are not guilty, where did you get the ring?"

"Bompard gave it to me."

"Then why did you pretend that it had been stolen from him? Why did you accuse this man?"—she pointed to Burroughs—"with killing Bompard because he had the ring in his possession? If you knew it was stolen from you, you must have known that he did not get it from Bompard."

Savary saw that he was trapped; and,

with his antic eye jerking, he leered up at the woman who was pursuing him.

"Well," he shouted, "what of it? What if I did kill Bompard? It was a fair quarrel."

"Then, why did you try to conceal it? Why did you not confess that you had quarreled? Would we have held that against you? Men have fought before and killed. If the cause was fair, were they called to account?"

"I am not on the witness-stand."

"You are in the prisoner's dock. And, whatever excuse you have for the killing, you have none for trying to keep the letters from us. What are you going to do with them?"

He did not answer, and she neared him by a step and stood over him with a menace in her strong hands.

"I have not got the letters."

With a quick movement she thrust back the lapel of his jacket and began feeling in his pockets. His eye flashed resistance, and he drew back, but the muzzle of a pistol in his face brought submission.

She searched him as skilfully as she had the Jew half an hour before. Burroughs, looking on, felt a wave of disgust as he watched her fingers, plainly used to such work; saw how nimbly they moved, and with what brazen certitude she "went through" the man.

Suddenly she gave a gurgle of triumph and jumped back, waving a thin packet above her head.

"The letters!" she crowed, holding them aloft in the hand on which shone the yellow sard with the seal of the Pretender.

Burroughs himself felt a lump rise in his throat. It was as though he saw the beginning of the end.

"Do you know what I believe?" charged the woman of Savary. "I believe that you were not only acting from jealousy, but that you have played us traitor. You were going to sell the letters and the ring to the Sultan. You needed money, and you could get more from him than by staying with us. There were four of us, and you would have got the reward alone. It looked profitable to play traitor. You'll find it didn't pay."

Savary somehow had lost his anger and

his nervousness. He grinned lazily. "You were always clever at putting two and two together," he retorted.

Burroughs interrupted.

"We are going?" he asked.

Simone nodded.

"I promised Jean, and I will go. But do you still wish to go back to your country? We will find the girl and restore her to her people. But is there nothing worth more to you—the fight, the intrigue, the success?" She waved the letters. "Is it not worth while? And have I not been able to make you care?"

She flung it out regardless of Savary's presence, and the words seemed to fan his temper to a flame.

"What if you have made him care?" he shouted. "Neither of you will live to enjoy the other. You played with Bompard, and you see where he is. You fling this man in my face, and an hour from now you will both be beyond help."

"You think you have won because you have found me out and have the letters, but having them is just what will do for you. Do you think I am a fool? Do you think that if I needed money bad enough to kill Bompard I am so careless as not to take the proper steps for getting it?"

In his anger he had boiled over, and Simone turned and regarded him a moment in deep silence. Their eyes battled, and his gave hers glance for glance. She looked behind uneasily.

"We had better go," she said to Burroughs. "I do not know what he means. It may be an idle threat, and it may be—"

"It may be the soldiers of the Sultan," cackled Savary, as the curtains of the great double door parted and two men leaped in.

One had his hand over Simone's mouth before she could scream, and had wrested the pistol from her grasp. The other attempted to seize Burroughs, but the latter jumped past him toward the door.

Then from out of the darkness of the gallery stepped another man, and the butt of his long gun crashed down on the American's head. The young man wilted like a tree under a lightning stroke. The Moor pushed him aside with his foot and made way for the negro, who came in leading Elise Dexter. Burroughs had been facing her as he fell. She recog-

nized him, and now she put her hands to her face to shut out the sight of him as he lay huddled there on the floor. It was only for a second; she started to kneel by him, but the man whom he had dodged shoved her away and gave a word to the fellow whose gun had laid the American low.

Obedying the nod of the leader, the soldier picked up Burroughs's body and dragged it out into the gallery, while the others were busied with the livelier captives. One man forced Simone to squat on the floor. Another stood over the Jew and his wife, who were protesting volubly that they were innocent of any and all crimes.

The big negro crossed quickly to Savary's side and whispered in his ear.

That worthy turned on the Frenchwoman with his hard laugh.

"Who laughs last?" he twitted. "Do you see now how it all happened? When you began to play fast and loose with me, I decided that I could play a game myself. I killed Bompard both to get even with you and to get the letters.

"When you helped the American escape from here I sent Selim for the Sultan's men, while I came back to have it out with your new friend. Your return delayed matters, but it is, after all, most fortunate.

"We have caught all the more birds in our little net—even the American, whom I had not expected the honor of entertaining." While he was speaking he stood erect and stretched his arms above his head. "I shall pay you for this stiffness," he snarled at Simone.

"*Monsieur*," said the man who had acted as leader, "your slave came to us with the word that if we would come here you would give us important news."

Savary nodded, and produced the materials for a cigarette.

"Will you not sit down?" he said politely. "I have indeed important news. You perhaps know that some French bankers are furnishing funds for the Pretender through agents in Tangier. You perhaps do not know that one of these agents is here on the way to him with important letters and carrying Mulley's ring as a passport to his presence."

"The woman there," said the man, pointing to Elise, "was seen with the

ring, but we have not been able to trace it."

"But I was fortunate enough to discover the plot and to capture the plotters," said Savary with oily ease.

Simone, who was squatting next him, leaned over a little and interjected a low word in French.

"Suppose I come back to you," she whispered. "It is not too late. You can save us yet. I will come back, and we can work together."

His good eye softened as he heard the word, and he paused as if the proposition had touched him. While he was debating, the soldier who had dragged out Burroughs slipped in and took his place by Simone.

He sat cross-legged, his head bowed on his breast, as if oblivious to what was going on. Elise, who was on the other side, drew away from him with loathing. She had seen him strike Burroughs, and the latter's white face as he lay on the floor had pained her like a knife-stab. She had been puzzled to find him there in the garb of a Moor; she also recognized in Simone the woman whom she had seen in the Jew's house. But only vaguely did she connect the two. It was all a part of the great enigma of the night; it was all Arabic, as unintelligible as a sentence of the Koran.

What was coming she did not know, but Burroughs's death meant the removal of her last hope; it was natural that she should turn from the man whose hands had helped in his undoing.

The Moors paid no attention to the entrance of their comrade. As the latter's eye, peering out from under his cowl, happened to encounter Savary's, the Frenchman suddenly stiffened and leaped from his seat with an oath. He got no farther.

A revolver in somebody's unlifted hand barked.

Savary, his wall-eye strangely contorted, pitched forward against Simone. At the same instant another shot extinguished the lamp, and darkness fell in the room.

There was a word and a blow between two other persons. There was another shot and fierce cursing.

Elise felt a pair of hands at her armpits. She was lifted to her feet, and,

with a man on either side, was rushed across the room.

She knew that she was treading on the bodies of prostrate men. The curtain swayed for her exit, and as they reached the court below, the man on her left leaned close to her, and Burroughs's voice in her ear whispered "Elise!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE END OF THE GAME.

WHEN the leader signed the soldier to remove Burroughs's body the fellow grasped him roughly by the collar and dragged him through the room and out onto the gallery.

There he loosened his grip, and, after a moment for getting his breath, he began to search the young man's pockets. He relieved him of two revolvers, a knife, a watch, and some gold coins that were still in his trousers' pockets.

Laying the loot on the floor, he rose to his feet, pulled the body after him, and prepared to tumble it over the railing into the court below. The thing lopped against him. With a muttered imprecation he seized the limp form about the middle and was in the act of bending it backward over the railing when the dead man suddenly stiffened in his arms. Like a flash he realized that the thing he was handling was not dead, but very much alive.

The realization came too late; he was altogether unprotected, so far as a wrestling defense was concerned. As he started to shout a hand closed on his throat, his heels were tripped up, and he went sprawling over backward with the tartar he had caught on top of him. They made a little noise as they scuffled, but it was drowned by the confusion that still reigned within—the laugh of Savary, a splutter of Arabic from the Jew; Simone's protesting.

It was fortunate for Burroughs that it was so, and he knew that it would not last long. What he did, must be done quickly. He did something that afterward he could not actually regret, for he believed it had been necessary, but he deplored it. His free hand found the knife that lay near him, and he used it.

Then he slowly got to his feet and felt

of his head. When the butt of the Moor's guns came down on it he had seen a star-studded firmament for a second. But his skull was protected by the folds of the turban, and he fell under the impetus of the blow, rather than because he was seriously injured.

Indeed, it had fallen so happily that it had left him little more than dazed. He was aware of the entrance of other persons besides the first two, and he did not attempt any resistance.

One of the rules of a football game is that when your eleven is up in the air, it is good tactics to play possum; thus getting time to recover both your breath and your balance. So, partly because of this instinctive feeling, and partly because his senses were really a bit numbed, he feigned unconsciousness.

When Elise was led in he very nearly gave himself away; he wanted to fight, but he hesitated against such odds, and he was still too witless to make up his mind quickly. His hesitation acted as much in his favor as a carefully conceived plan would have done.

He had another bad moment when the fellow grabbed him by the collar and started to bundle him out. Burroughs wanted to object, but now wisdom was creeping in, and he knew that the odds would be too great. So he kept quiet.

He also allowed the man to go through his pockets, because that gave him still more time to get his breath. Even while he was being searched he devised the plan which he put in practise.

The Moor was about the American's build, and the latter proceeded to appropriate his outer garments, his fez, his jacket, his long burnoose.

He was soon ready. He regained his weapons—two revolvers and a knife. The latter he stuck in his belt where he could get at it quickly; the former he took, one in each hand. Cowering the burnoose over his head and chin, he draped the ends over the pistols.

It was a tense moment when he parted the curtains, walked across the room, and seated himself between the two women. As he adjusted his legs under him he covered one of Simone's hands with a fold of his mantle and, under its protection, found her fingers and gave it a meaning pressure.

He felt her tremble at his touch, but she did not look at him or make any sign except to lean over and whisper to Savary, in an effort to hold his attention, while her fingers were closing on the revolver that Burroughs slipped to her.

She succeeded in getting the weapon comfortably in her palm, but not in deceiving Savary. He detected the trick and with an oath he jumped for him.

Simone fired.

Burroughs's bullet put the light out. Then he wheeled and smashed the Moor who was nearest him in the face.

"Hurry, *monsieur*," he heard Simone's voice, "I will keep them busy."

There was another shot, followed by a scream from the negro. Burroughs had already lifted Elise to her feet and started out; but the man who had her in charge was equally vigilant, and he, too, was at her side. He did not realize what had happened, and it was plain that in the darkness he took Burroughs for a comrade who was seeking to save their prisoner.

They reached the street without being overtaken. There the soldier turned to wait for his companions, speaking to the American as he did so. Fortunately the latter did not have to reply; for the words were not out of the man's mouth when Simone emerged from the door, slamming it in the face of some one who was two steps behind.

The lock clicked musically—at least it was music to Burroughs, who had occasion this time to thank Heaven that so much of the modern had come into Morocco.

The Moor at his side, however, did not see it in such a light. With his baffled comrade inside hammering on the door and clamoring to get out, he spoke again to the supposed soldier who was holding Elise and asked him to look after the Frenchwoman. He spoke in Arabic, however, and the American gave no heed.

Simone was moving away and the Moor extended an arm to detain her. She whirled on him and a pistol glittered in her hand. The Moor backed toward Burroughs, whose fist caught him on the jugular, and he tumbled on the flagstones.

The Frenchwoman laughed.

"Quick, now," she called; and, with Elise between them they ran down the street, leaving the imprisoned soldiers to make a light, count their losses, and, finally, to get out, their mission a failure.

The fugitives made a turn at the first corner, and then another and another, Simone guiding. Sure that they were not pursued, they stopped.

The thoroughfare in which they stood held no life. The city was in the dead hours of the early morning—the hours just before dawn, when men and dogs and all manner of breathing things are resting, if the night gives them any rest.

Simone broke the silence by one of her low laughs. She put one hand on the arm of the American girl and, swinging her round so that the light from a street-lamp fell full on her face, surveyed her earnestly.

"*Mademoiselle*," she said at last, indicating Burroughs, "he loves you. I hope you are worthy of him. He is a man."

It was not an observation which Elise could have answered, even if she had understood, which she didn't.

She gave the other look for look, and then turned questioningly to the artist.

The Frenchwoman lifted her shoulders ever so little.

"I have won," she said, "I have the letters and the ring. You have your lady. Good-by, Jean. I am not such a good woman, but sometimes I have my good moments. Maybe you might have made me good. You are a man."

She extended her large white hand impulsively and Burroughs's fingers closed over it.

"I hope you understand," he said blunderingly, "I hope you understand that I'm very much obliged to you; that I—"

Simone waved her hand.

"Good-by—I must hurry!"

With a final quick nod that included both, she vanished in the blue-gray shadows, leaving Burroughs and Elise standing in the middle of the deserted street.

"Where have you been?" each asked the other in the same breath. But without waiting for an answer Elise proceeded wearily:

"Can we go back to the hotel. Let's get away from here. It's so awful."

"We'll try," replied Burroughs, "but I'm not sure I know the way. Are you all right?"

Elise clasped her hands round his arm and leaned toward him.

"Yes, but it has been a nightmare," she murmured. "Can we go?"

Burroughs looked around him. Above, in the rift between the houses, he could see a fillet of pearl-gray, moonlit sky. Against it, towering over them, was the slender form of a minaret. At a little distance they discerned the doors of a mosque.

After a shade of hesitation he said: "I don't know where we are, but if I can get up there above the roofs, perhaps I can get our bearings. We've got to risk it; it's that or wandering round here all night. If you will wait here, I will try."

The quick tightening of her fingers foretold her answer.

"I'll go with you," she said. "I wouldn't stay here alone for a million dollars."

"You are not too tired to climb?"

"I'll hold out," she replied.

The mosque doors were open, and, slipping inside on tiptoe, Burroughs groped his way toward the corner over which rose the minaret. Feeling along the wall with his hands, he found a little door, and, inside, a spiral stairway.

"Quiet, now," he muttered. "If we're caught here, it'll probably mean more trouble."

She answered by a hand-pressure, and they forthwith began the ascent, treading lightly, scarcely daring to breathe, till they reached the platform at the summit.

The girl gasped in amazement.

Above them was the pale-blue tent of sky. The stars had gone out; nearly at the zenith hung the faded moon like a half-nibbled cheese. To the east a faint orange flush told of the speedy coming of the day. On one side the white terraces marched down toward the sea; just below them was the long street that led from the Soko to the landing-place and their haven.

A little sob rose in the girl's throat as she realized what this meant. A few more

minutes and they would be out of the danger zone: the home-path lay in front.

Burroughs knew it, too, but for one long look he turned his eyes back on the terraced city of adventure.

Safety was near; yet, for a moment, before he set his foot toward it, his thoughts went back to the strange woman who had touched the circle of his life for a night. He heard the murmur of her caressing voice; he felt the velvet of her hand against his own. Her influence was still present.

But it was a fading vision. There, at the top of the minaret, while day whitened, he was bidding good-by to the mysterious East, to the pale world of roofs, to the perfume of musk and aloes, to men and women of strange ways.

Elise moved and a small sigh escaped her. Swiftly he was brought back to that presence at his side—the Western woman who was of his own kind.

He had a vision of her as he had seen her on the steamer-deck in clean, cool garments, lithe of figure, blue-eyed and smiling; fine in speech and action.

As he heard the whisper of her sigh, he bent forward and took her in his arms.

"We are safe now, girl," he comforted. "Don't worry, we'll get out all right."

She yielded to him, and against his breast he felt her nod.

"And you're mine," he said vehemently. "Mine. No one shall come between us."

"Yours."

Their warm lips met, and her arm tightened comfortably round his neck.

"You're not hurt in any way?" he questioned solicitously.

"No. Are you? Where have you been, and what does it all mean? It seems years—years."

"It's a long story. Are you able to go on now? We mustn't waste time."

"Ready," she said.

"I've lost the ring," he said suddenly.

"As if that mattered, when I was afraid I had lost you."

At nine that morning Mrs. Ragsdale, quite pink and pretty, and remarkably young looking for a lady of forty, swept into the hotel dining-room. She caught sight of Elise and Burroughs sitting at

a table near a window, and pounced down on them with a smile that was warm and superior.

"Ah," she exclaimed, "I was afraid you might be late. You know we're going back to Gibraltar this morning."

"We are sorry," began Burroughs, but the widow babbled on. "I know you'll forgive me for running away from you last night and leaving you to your own devices."

Both Burroughs and Elise stared.

"You see, when we got back from our walk the Turnbulls carried us off to dinner with some friends of theirs who have a villa a little way out. We wanted you, but you weren't back."

"Where on earth were you? Mooning around, I suppose. Did the porter tell you where we had gone? I knew you wouldn't mind, and I knew I was perfectly safe in leaving you to amuse yourselves. I thought we should have been back earlier, but the night was so pleasant we stayed longer than we thought. You had retired when we got back."

"After all, I don't imagine you were very much aggrieved at having to spend the evening together."

She simpered and shrugged, and ended with a smile that was intended to be coy.

(The End.)

THE STORM.

By Jennie Harris Oliver.

OF real estate and wedding-bells,
and a mixture of spring
freshets and the course of love.

It was a storm quite notable in history. It came out of a blur of angry, evening red, with wild sheets of screaming, white rain from the murky, boiling river. Under it the little cabin cowered like a beaten hound—even the three shadows within looming grotesquely backward from the fireplace,

Burroughs so far forgot himself as to whistle.

"I know you'll forgive me," said the widow, "when I tell you that Mr. McIntosh and I are about to be married shortly."

The artist reached over and shook hands.

"My dear lady," he said, "you mustn't feel the least compunction. The porter gave us your message when we got in."

He did not add that he himself had applied a gold piece to that functionary's palm when they received the startling news that their absence had been overlooked, the hotel people thinking that they were with the other party, and their chaperon believing that they were at the hotel. Burroughs had also obtained the Jew's letter demanding ransom.

"That's nice," went on the lady; "I hope you didn't have too dull an evening."

Again the smile.

"No," agreed Burroughs, "it was not what you would call dull. Still, we're ready to go back to-day. We've some news for Mrs. Dexter. You see, Elise and I—we're engaged, too."

"I knew the wise thing was to leave you," said Mrs. Ragsdale.

shrinking and flaring fitfully as the ed-dying flame sprang upward and strung itself like rubies on threads of cobweb swaying from the blackened rafters.

Between crashes of deafening thunder two of the shadows talked doggedly and persistently.

"Yes, Steve," said one, lifting his shrewd, calculating features in a vain endeavor to suck into life his neglected pipe, "yuh ricolliet whut I told yuh last time yuh ast fer Retta-May. Conditions is jist th' same now, and allus will be."

"Cur'us, Steve, yuh kain't remember that old Ike Pedigrew don't say things

fer th' fun of hit. Twenty year I be'n wantin' that north forty. Yer daddy and I fit hand tuh hand over hit; but he died a year too soon. Lived, an' I'd a had him. Reckon I've got yuh, Steve, instid—fer hit's that north forty, er no Retta-May."

"They hain't no jestice in hit, Ike," cried the young man hotly. "Hit's plum' robbery. How'm I goin' to take keer o' Retta ef I give up the only part o' my land that's wuth workin'?"

"I hain't astin' yuh to take keer on her; jest tuh figger on that land with me. Ef thar's iny other way tuh do hit, so much the better, fer I've got other plans fer Retta-May. Not that hit hain't fitten fer her tuh bring me somethin' fer her raisin', as her sisters never done."

"They was saller and skinny; but, land, look at Retta-May! Blue and peenk and gold—slim and straight; strong as a young pant'er. Ef she hain't wuth more tuh yuh than the north forty, why, yuh don't hev tuh take her—that's all."

There was a sudden, fierce outburst of the storm, as if the very prince of demons had broken loose; and under its clutching hand the stanch little structure shuddered and rattled fearsomely. Dark streams of rain crawled in from the sill-less door, and the girl rose silently to sweep back the flood and block its further entrance with an old ragged coat.

"'Tain't jest, Ike," fumed the young man when at last he could make himself heard. "Yuh know there's coal and mebbe gas on that paster-ridge, and that I'm raisin' money tuh work hit. Yuh think I didn't see yuh with that passel o' prospectors from Little Rock, but I did. And hit's mine, Ike Pedigrew, and I don't 'low tuh give hit up. I 'low tuh dress Retta like a queen when I builds her a new house up under that bunch o' pine!"

"Well, Steve," answered the old man provokingly, slowly sucking at his re-lighted pipe, "I reckon hit'll turn out by y'ur buildin' one on stilts fer her over on the south forty under them elms. Reckon yuh'll hev tuh raise rice tuh keep her, fer I'm goin' tuh hev that north forty—that, er she marries Jake Dempsey."

"Don't make much difference tuh me."

Jake offered me mighty nigh as good a forty, and a fine Jersey cow throwed in. Reckon I'd ruther hev Jake fer relation—he hain't so blamed obstinate."

Pedigrew laughed disagreeably, and bent to throw on another log.

"Reckon yuh see how hit is, Steve," he went on, after he had gone to stuff up a broken shutter and stop the swirl of red embers that enveloped them for a breathless moment. "Y'ur north forty and mine bumps heads at a mighty convenient bend in the river. Now, whin I git busy with them commodities that natur' has packed in thar, I kin mighty easy make use o' natur's waterway tuh pack 'em off tuh companies that needs 'em. Reckon old man Pedigrew won't be a rich man then—no, I reckon not!"

"Whut ef Retta and I takes things in our own hands, Ike? Whut ef—"

"I'll tell yuh, Steve, whut ef. Retta-May'll marry Jake Dempsey in the mawnin', jist as soon's hit is good and light. Ast him and Jestice Potter over to witness the windin' up—be handy tuh hev 'em inway the cat jumps. 'Nother thing, Retta-May hain't her own boss by two year and then some. Retta-May hain't be'n outen this yard sense yuh an' I tangled up in this deal. Guess I hold the whup-hand, Steve."

The young man dropped his face in his hands and sat for some time in deep thought. The roaring light sprang rudely over his dark head, over the old man's hard, shrewd eyes, and the girl's beauty. Around them roared and wailed and crashed the tireless fury of the storm. Finally Stephen Martin sprang erect, a brave resolve in his deep-set gray eyes.

"I'll give her up, Ike," he said huskily. "I'd ruther she married some one as has plenty then tuh go out into the world empty-handed with me. Heaven knows I'd ruther do without her than tuh see her eyes grow hopeless and her form thin and bent like her mother's and mine."

"Stop!" cried the girl suddenly, with blazing eyes. "Yuh don't never leave hyar 'thout me. Leave him hev the old north forty. I'd ruther hev yuh than Jake ef he was made o' gold. As soon as hit's light we'll walk outen hyar and leave pappy with his money. Yuh'll hev tuh do hit, Stephen," she went on, with her excited eyes on his troubled face,

"'cause I'll go inyways — pappy kain't keep me in this prison no more."

Stephen took the girl's coaxing hand and smoothed it gently. He thought of it seamed and darkened and roughened. Still her eyes commanded him, and he answered hesitantly:

"The north forty's your'n, Ike, and Retta's mine."

"Retta - May, yuh're a fool," growled her father with well-assumed dissatisfaction. "Yuh'll wear rags yit. Reckon we'd better put this deal in writin' right now, Steve. There ain't no use o' waitin'."

"Hadn't we better fix this door first, Ike?" said the young man, regarding with suspicion the black stream seeping through Retta's barrier. "Looks like we'd be swamped perty soon."

"Hain't nuthin' we kin do but let the water run out again. Does that ever time hit rains. Hain't never be'n swamped yit. Retta-May, climb onto that bench and tuck yer feet under yuh. Now, Steve, write hit in that I gits y'ur north forty as divided from the south forty by Big Rock and Sentinel Gum Tree. Hain't no mistakin' that way o' puttin' hit. Everythin' north's mine—everythin' south's your'n. Write hit in, Steve—write hit in!"

Standing almost ankle-deep in water, the young man bent over the rude table and gravely wrote the document as directed.

As he handed it to Pedigrew the cabin tilted sickeningly forward, there was a gurgling inrush of the foamy flood, and the fire went out quickly with a strong smell of wet ashes. They were in total darkness.

"Retta," shouted Stephen, groping for her in the blackness. "Retta! Retta!"

There was a gasping cry from among the huddled furniture as the cabin righted itself with a hissing outpour of water, and then sprang sidewise like a chunk of driftwood in a whirlpool; and in a moment he held the girl's dripping, shaking form tightly with one arm, while he braced his back against the heaving side of the rough wall and spread a protecting hand over the silk of her hair.

Any minute something might drop upon them—some awful thing reach out of the hideous mêlée of sound.

They could hear the old man blundering and sputtering furiously among the shifting débris. They could hear the grinding and tearing of rock and tree—the continuous swirl and roar of angry water bearing them jerkily along in the awful gloom.

Occasionally a red flare of lightning showed them the cabin's wild interior, with objects heaped grotesquely against the fireplace. By one such flash the old man made his way over to Stephen and Retta.

"Devil's own night, this!" he shouted angrily. "Be'n hyar nigh on to twenty year, and never did see no sich goin's on before. I'll bet we're in the river right now, goin' south like thunder."

So he punctuated the awful uncertainty, and reiterated raspingly as the night wore on.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity of tipping and whirling none could guess whither, they felt the cabin settle firmly and remain at anchor. The storm rested, and through the broken shutters filtered the grateful light of the coming dawn.

Righting the obstructing furniture, they made their way through the slimy mud to the door. Pulling it wide on its sagging hinges, they looked out on a scene that drew a sharp cry of wonder from the young couple and a yell of consternation from the thwarted old schemer.

They were south of Big Rock and Sentinel Gum Tree, on a firm, root-bound clump that had washed safely out into the stream and worked its way to a quiet inlet in the water side of the south forty.

The two valuable pastures were nowhere to be seen. Undermined and crumbled by the wearing flood of centuries, they had melted and spread uselessly under the furious yellow stream, and over their coal and gas the water rushed and foamed and swirled; while, freed from its pent-up, film-covered pools, Stephen Martin's southland lay green and smiling on the ridges—richly, muckily black where the deeps caught the rosy morning light.

Amazed by the miracle wrought overnight by the storm and the freakish

river, the trio stood, silently gazing from the cabin-door. Finally the old man spoke:

"Well, Steve," he said matter-of-factly, "'tain't whut I expected, but 'tis as 'tis, and I hain't goin' tuh squeal about

hit. I reckon the parson'll do as well as the jestice, the way things has turned out, 'sides bein' a sight nearer, lessen he's washed away.

"Hurry up breakfast, Retta-May—I'm mighty nigh starved to death!"

THE HIDDEN HATE.

By Howard Fitzalan.

The body of a murdered man calls aloud for vengeance, yet culprit and executioner are closer than brothers.

A NOVEL—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SWAMP TREASURE.

"F," argued Hugh Coates, as he took notice from time to time of the dingy house with the dying Virginia creeper, "if he (or she) wants a man who places no value upon a human life, it might be better for an applicant to go armed and prove the truth of his statement by pumping lead into the reckless advertiser."

Seen through the gloom of lower Washington Square, the house of the man who had need of a homicide presented few attractions.

It was old, but the architecture was commonplace, its windows needed washing, and one of the newel-posts was broken, giving the place the aspect of a wicked wag with his head on one side.

Hugh had been standing on the opposite side of the street for several minutes now, and his liking for the house was decreasing with every added second he stayed there.

Now he observed that it was an object of indecision with another besides himself; and the fact that he shared with the place the scrutiny of the man of the silken scarf came near to sending him away with an unanswered advertisement in his pocket.

He had left this one until the last because he was in no way particular about answering it at all; for it sounded very

much as though it were the slogan of a Mafia society:

WANTED—A man who places no value upon a human life. K. S., 87 Orton Street, City.

He had taken out the slip of paper and was completing the hundredth reading, when a cough at his side gave Hugh to understand that the man with the silken scarf had decided that his personality was more interesting than the house.

The scarf was of knitted gray silk, and the man wore it under his overcoat as most men wear stock-collars, pinning it half-way down with a cameo pin. Otherwise he was most unremarkable in attire and appearance, except that one would judge his eyes to be brighter than most.

"Are you going to answer that advertisement?" he asked directly.

"Are you anxious to get into trouble?" was Hugh's uncivil rejoinder. "If you are, a fine way to do it is to mix up in somebody else's business."

"I'm not very diplomatic," sighed the other, turning away. "One man to do the work and one man to talk—they don't go together. Pardon me, friend."

Hugh softened.

"If it'll do you any good to know, I'll tell you, of course."

"Well, to a certain extent, it seems imperative," replied the man with the scarf, twisting the cameo round. "Consuming curiosity is my curse. I want to

know why that fellow advertised for a man who put no value on human life. Not an ordinary advertisement; you'll grant that. My theory is that he is crazy—"

"He?" questioned Hugh.

"His name is Selfridge; an old fellow whose wife just died. He's got a son at college, and a stepdaughter who's been acting as servant-girl. It's a rooming-house; he boarded there with Madam Ruiz when she ran it.

"Used to be a fine old fellow then, they say; and the madam and her daughter, and he and his son all went over to the Fourteenth Street Theater every Saturday night and had supper in Lüchow's. Then he married her, and all of a sudden they change. They dismiss the servants, and madam and her daughter do all the cooking and house-cleaning, while the old man 'tends furnace after he gets home from his work in the custom-house—has a soft snap there at eighteen hundred dollars a year.

"That's been nearly two years ago now. Stunning girl, even if she does make beds and wash the dishes and scrub the floors. And then, I forgot about that, too—she takes French and Spanish lessons and goes to one of the best dancing-schools in New York."

"And the son's at college?" questioned Hugh.

"Second year. He's home now, I guess. The old lady—Madam Ruiz that was—she died three or four days ago, and he came home for the funeral. Now, the old guy puts in this ad about wanted a man who cares nothing for a human life. And it's got me dotty trying to guess."

"Why don't you ask him, then?" was Hugh's sensible query.

The man with the scarf did not answer this question, but his eyes seemed to grow brighter as he planned an evasion. It came in the form of a statement that the old man was apt to recognize him, although it hardly seemed to Hugh that the gentleman was telling the truth.

"How did you find out so much about these people?" Hugh further inquired.

"It's a curse—my curiosity," bewailed the man with the scarf. "I'll go to no end of pains to gratify it. It'll cost me my life yet. But, say, be a good fellow

and apply for the job. He'll probably give it to you—"

He weighed Hugh up.

"A nice, strong-looking fellow like you, with a fine, free air of not caring for anything—you look like you don't give a hang for human life. Tell him you don't, anyhow, just to find out what it's all about. I'll wait for you out here on the pavement. And, say, if the old man's gone nutty, here's a cannon you can tote along to make a grand-stand play with."

Hugh felt the left pocket of his coat sag under the weight of the heavy bit of hardware that was dropped into it. If the man was pretending this curiosity to get him to go into the house, it was curious that he should arm him with a six-shooter.

As his hand closed on the butt of it, Hugh made up his mind, and, nodding curtly to his new acquaintance, stepped across to 87 Orton Street and rang the bell.

The haze was heavy and the lights glistened from Washington Square like phosphorescent jellyfish in a sea of moon mist. Orton Street was quiet under the shroud.

The man on the other side of the street had become invisible, only a gray blur indicating that there was another side at all. If people were traversing the thoroughfare, they were gentlemen of predatory disposition in tennis-shoes, or else the fog was wrapped like cotton about their boot-soles.

Under such circumstances, the mere opening of a door startled Hugh into gripping the weapon in his pocket.

The hall was dark, for the flickering gas was almost hidden by the four sides of a semiopaque Flemish lantern that swung overhead.

"Now, now," warned the voice of some one who stood behind the door, exposing but enough of his head to give sight of the one without, "you might as well not come in and worry us. We don't know anything about your mail—and we've closed your room. This is a private house—a private house—and it is also a house of grief. I should think you would have some shame."

The tone had become high and querulous; and Hugh, accustomed to the haze,

now made out a segment of rough, bristly hair and beard, between which an eye opened and shut rapidly.

"I called in answer to an advertisement," said Hugh, emboldened by the age and complaining tones of the man. "It's true it appeared yesterday," he added extenuatingly, "and you've probably got the man you wanted by to-day. But I saw it only this morning."

"Yes," shrilled the old fellow in a passion. "And I suppose you're going to ask me who I want you to kill. I dare say you'll tell me you've killed men before—"

"To tell you the truth," replied Hugh frankly, "that's the very reason I've been hesitating for five or six minutes across the street. I was afraid that was just what you wanted, and I'm willing to adopt any profession but murder. Are you 'K. S.'?"

He thought it better to make no show of the information gathered from the man across the street.

The old man did not answer his question, but fumbled about in the dark hall, returning with a lighted match cupped between his palms and held in such a way that the escaping ray fell aslant Hugh's cheek-bones.

"Come in," he said abruptly as the door slammed at Hugh's heels.

Another door thrown open ahead revealed a room and a tiny fire, by which sat a girl, her head resting on her palms, the red glow upon her dusky hair, a silhouette of her head in shadow like that of a young Arcadian shepherd. Unmoved by the entrance of a stranger, she swung a foot and ankle, whose slimness was not disguised by the coarseness of stocking and shoe, with the regularity of a pendulum, her eyes fastened upon the fire.

Across the room an oil-lamp burned on a table that was scattered with coarse paper filled with figures and sketches, over which the old man threw a copy of an evening journal before he motioned his visitor to a chair.

As for the girl, he paid as little attention to her as she had given to their entrance.

"Draw up," he said, and Hugh saw across the lamp-lit table a man with bristly iron-gray hair cut close to his

scalp, a beard—pure white—clipped, watery eyes, and a pair of ears phenomenally small. Certainly not one to fear. His attire denoted cleanly poverty—an old office-coat, frayed cuffs, a white string tie.

"I worded that advertisement wrong," he commented as he gazed at Hugh. "You are the first man who applied that I could take. The rest were rascals. You—you're well-dressed, and you look honest. You haven't come here out of curiosity—to mock me?"

"I came here with my pal, Phil Bemis, from Nevada, three weeks ago," answered Hugh. "We were a couple of the unlucky ones; sunk everything we had, and got nothing. We've run short of everything but clothes and linen—we bought a lot of that when we were flush in San Francisco.

"We're mining engineers by profession, and did well up to this year. Then we thought we had a good thing round Goldfield—and we were the good things. Want any references?"

"Yes," replied the old man. "My name's Selfridge. You can find out all about me from my bankers—Ellison & Head."

Hugh gave him his visiting-card and several letters, over which old Selfridge studied, holding the letters up to the light as though to detect blotches or erasures. Silently he handed them back.

"I suppose," he said, "you're curious about what I mean by that advertisement?"

"Eh?—yes," rejoined Hugh, whose eyes had wandered to the silhouette of the little head made by the dancing firelight.

Since his first glance at her, it had seemed unnecessary for the old man to go into any details about the work he wished done; it was already settled in the mind of Hugh Coates that it was he, and he alone, who could do what was required.

"I mean," said old Selfridge sternly, "your own life—Do you value it?"

The pendulum movement of foot and ankle became slower, then still, and Hugh was divided between dislike of untruth and fear of being adjudged a coward before the girl had even looked at him.

"Why, I don't know, sir," he replied a trifle uneasily. "I don't know that

I've ever given the subject very much thought. I've got no great quarrel with life—but the devil's had me in his hand once or twice, and I don't believe I showed the white feather. I don't guess any healthy man is anxious to die—but I reckon I'm as courageous as the average."

He was glad to note that the foot and ankle remained still; evidently he had acquitted himself well enough to be judged worthy of a listener's attention.

He had not been paying very close attention to the old man, but it was plain that he had been accepted as one worthy of trust; for when his mind recalled the presence of Selfridge it was to discover that part of a narrative had escaped him.

"One of the oldest families of the South, but fallen upon evil times, so my father came North just after the Civil War, and I never saw any of my relatives after that except Uncle Benjamin, who left me his library when he died—very old books that came from Selfridge Hall, in Powhatan County, Maryland."

The girl turned and met the gaze of the young engineer, and again the drift of the old man's speech was lost in Hugh's contemplation of her pallid face, her tragic eyes, expressionless when she saw he observed her.

What eyes! She seemed too little to have them, too slender, too young. Could this be the girl who made the beds and washed the dishes? It was like using one of Rodin's sculptures to grow spring onions in. Had it coarsened her hands?

"Mr. Coates!"

"Yes, sir, I heard what you said."

And, putting his head between his hands, Hugh Coates leaned his elbows on the table and heard the old man drone on for close upon an hour.

"I accept, sir," he said instantly, when a long silence seemed to indicate that the story was completed.

"You understand," said Selfridge carefully, "that you are to be paid exactly one-twenty-fifth of whatever treasure is found, and nothing at all until it is found. Another one-twenty-fifth must go to another man whom I have yet to find.

"The remainder goes to my son, Horace Selfridge, whom my stepdaughter

Donna is to marry as soon as he has completed his course at college. Meanwhile, she will go with us to Powhatan County and cook for us and keep camp—that is Donna, over there."

He nodded toward the girl by the fire, who took no more interest in the statement than though it concerned some unknown person. Crossing to the mantel, old Selfridge took down a cabinet picture which he laid before Hugh.

"And that is Horace!"

If his tone had been casual in referring to the girl, it made up for it in the statement having to do with the original of the flabby young man in the flamboyant college clothes, as weak-eyed and squirrel-eared as his father, yet not without a certain sort of good looks.

"You mentioned a friend," said Selfridge, as he replaced the photograph.

"My pal," returned Hugh eagerly; "we've been together since our freshman year. It'll be hard, parting with him. I—I—wonder if you couldn't find a place for him. I—I'd hate to leave Phil."

"I need another man; if he's willing to go on the same terms—"

"Willing!" shouted Hugh, grasping the old man's hand. "Willing! You're on! The two of us report for duty tomorrow morning! Say, you've saved our lives!"

So overjoyed was he that he with difficulty restrained his terpsichorean desires. He concluded the arrangements hastily, for he felt that nothing short of an air-ship would take him speedily enough to Phil Bemis.

As he crossed the room, he paused and regarded the girl, but she still rocked.

When he went out she was still rocking, and he did not see her eyes again.

CHAPTER II.

DAMON AND PYTHIAS.

It was still misty without, but the noise of the closing door was enough to attract the attention of the watcher across the street, and he whistled softly. Hugh crossed over.

"I'm afraid I can't be explicit," he said shortly, as he returned the revolver. "But I assure you that it isn't any case

of murder. It's a question of a risky undertaking that the old gentleman's going to engage in, and he needs a man to help him. That's all. Really it is. The advertisement meant nothing but a disregard for one's own life."

He heard the man breathe relievedly.

"And now, if it's not too much trouble," added Hugh, as they moved toward Eighth Street, "would you mind gratifying my curiosity? Why did you want to know, and why didn't you ask yourself?"

The man had dropped his somewhat careful tone when he answered:

"I'm a special detective, that's all, my friend, and I went to answer the ad myself. I took a long chance and pretended to be a cutthroat, and he threw me out. I thought he'd recognized me for a 'bull.' I'm glad it's no Black Hand stuff. But we people have got to look out for that. I'm obliged to you."

And, with a curt "good night," the detective cut off in the direction of Sixth Avenue, passing out of this narrative.

Hugh boarded a car, and on reaching his destination—a dingy Twenty-Third Street hotel—found a scribbled note below the dressing-table light.

Sallying out again in response to it, he joined Mr. Philip Bemis over corned-beef hash and poached eggs in a restaurant which was, at that hour, a private dining-room for the two.

"You needn't look at me," said Phil, sopping up the last of the allotted portion of bread. "The ads were principally designed for those who love work for its own sweet sake."

"One man offered me as high as seven-fifty for merely keeping his books, doing his typewriting, and running his errands. He said a girl would do it for six, but he wasn't mean— What? You've got something?"

"Put that between us and it makes a sandwich," answered Hugh gleefully, as he laid down the clipping which implied sanguinary deeds.

"What—that crazy one? You answered it?"

"'And done well,'" replied Mr. Coates. "There's a job for both. Want to hear about it?"

"Nope," replied Mr. Bemis. "I'm with you, Hughey— My dear!"

He called the leisurely waitress.

"We have got a job," he said. "You can duplicate that order, little lady. That goes for me and my friend. No, old pal, I haven't the slightest desire to hear the details. All I insist on is rubber gloves. I hate to get my hands all covered with gore. It's so sticky."

"Oh, that's all a pipe-dream. The old man's a little dotty, I think. But he's willing to pay our expenses. And there's a girl—"

"I love your lucidity," commented Phil.

"He comes of a good Southern family—" began Hugh.

"There are," interrupted Phil, "no families in the South that are not good; nor that did not once own slaves."

"And his cousin still owns a place down in Powhatan County, Maryland, called Selfridge Hall. He also owns a few thousand acres of salt-marshes, swamps, and creeks bordering on the Atlantic Ocean."

"Following the trail of one of these inlets to one of these swamps, you come to a small islet. On this is buried the treasure of a certain piratical privateersman, who departed this life in 1815. He was the great-great-uncle of the gentleman who employs us."

"It appears that he returned from his piratical career in bad shape and applied to his brother to take him. His brother, thinking he was poor, did so grudgingly. To repay him for such a lack of fraternal feeling, the dying pirate ripped open the binding of a book and secreted therein the map showing where he had hidden his ill-gotten gains, together with a statement as to why he did it. He then neatly sewed up the binding again."

"The volume in question remained in Selfridge Hall until after the Civil War, when our Mr. Selfridge's grandfather died, willing Selfridge Hall to his eldest son, who cordially hated his brother Benjamin and his brother William—our Mr. Selfridge's father."

"So both of them had to go to work, and they came North, that their aristocratic relatives and friends might not behold their degradation. Uncle Benjy, it appears, froze on to some of the books, among them the one doctored by the dying pirate."

"When he died, our Mr. Selfridge got it. A year or so ago he accidentally tore the binding—and since that time he's been trying to save enough money to go down there and get the treasure out of soak. With it he intends to buy Selfridge Hall, marry his turnip-faced son to a darling of a girl, and start one of the really-truly first families of America on its aristocratic way again."

"Where do we come in?" asked Phil. "And why all this bunk about the value of a human life?"

"Oh, he's superstitious. You see, the dying pirate to whom I have constantly referred in my narrative, a sort of a Red Ralph the Rover, evidently thought that to give such a treasure to some person unknown without having had any fun out of it himself was poor business. Since he had gone to all the trouble of stealing it, he made up his mind he'd frame up a little diversion for his life in another sphere."

"So, in the narrative, he cautioned the finder of the treasure to avoid laying his hands on a certain ruby necklace which was cursed by the first man whose life he took and which had already been responsible for the death of seven men."

"I myself," he writes, "scorning the wisdom of the ancients, put my godless hand upon this necklace, and the same day received the wound which has been my death. He who touches it will surely die, so I caution you to go warily and avoid even the graze of this malignant jewel."

"And so he's going to let us dig, is he?"

"That's about it, I suppose. Does it feeze you?"

"Not if I've got my rabbit's foot with me. When do we start?"

"To-morrow or the next day. We're to help him choose a big touring-car and to motor down to Powhatan County, as it isn't important enough for a railroad to go within a hundred miles of it. We're to make camp at the mouth of Goose Inlet, while he locates the treasure, which is up-creek."

"He'll have to work by night, because the treasure's on his uncle's property, and if the uncle catches him at it the treasure will be 'his'n.' Selfridge doesn't trust anybody a whole lot. We're to bring the

treasure down-creek, a canoe-load at a time, and load it into the motor-car. When we get a motor-load, he'll take it and one of us up to the Philadelphia Mint, leaving the other to guard the treasure, and the girl as his personal representative to see we don't double-cross him."

"He figures on three hundred and fifty thousand dollars without counting the cursed ruby necklace. I've got a hunch he'll let us have the necklace in addition to the two twenty-fifths. So if the map isn't the bunk, we've hitched onto a good thing."

They clasped hands across the table.

"What a good fellow you are, Hugh, getting me in on everything," said Phil, as they looked at each other.

"Aren't we pals?" demanded Hugh in surprise.

"You bet we are," returned the more demonstrative Phil. "And if our finances are low, they are not too low to drink to the best thing on earth—a friendship between two men. By Cæsar, it's something that lasts, that is."

Yet Hugh found himself thinking of the girl at the fireside, with the head of an Arcadian shepherd-boy and the eyes of tragedy.

CHAPTER III.

WHERE THE GRAY GEESE FLY.

It was a sunless afternoon, when nothing seemed alive, not even the sea. Under a sky like dull platinum lay the vast stretch of gray marshland and ocean.

No wind stirred the gorse and the thistles; a single sailing-ship, far out from land, lay helplessly to port as though congealed within an iceberg. To the south, the serpentine flow of Goose Inlet became glass-like as it lost itself in the cypress swamp, a black blotch upon the gray, and an occasional thin streak of smoke ascending from the sheltered cove alone gave evidence of habitation, human or otherwise.

To the two young men who came out of the little enclosed horseshoe of rock to stroll on the beach, the vastness, the loneliness, the silence, were only as old friends.

They had seen many such places under the sky, and they liked them better than the limitations of the cities. For the sea has its own language for those who love her, the broad dome of the sky tells many secrets to him who understands, and the smell of the strong fresh air has its own tang which only its friends may know.

These hardened, bronzed and roughly dressed young fellows were the friends of the elements and the lords of the silent places. It was given to them to know Nature as others know men and women, and they liked Nature better. She was kindlier, honester, giving warning of her moods.

Marvelously ignorant, these two, of those creatures which civilization has made of the noble animal—man. Their friendship for one another had been all-sufficient, and they had found no necessity for other ties. So, strong in the belief that all other men were like themselves, they had the innocent, confiding faith of children in the goodness of the world.

Now, stretched out in the gorse, with the salt air upon their faces, they filled their pipes from a single pouch, and stretched out in that glorious laziness which comes from a knowledge that no duty is suffering from neglect.

"Wonder when we begin to earn our money?" asked Hugh, after his eyes had grown tired of watching the gyrations of a pair of wild geese flying swampward.

"Wish he'd take us in there with him?" grumbled Phil, pointing toward the white bark of the birches that girdled the swampland, and where the arriving geese seemed to have stirred up some commotion; for now, out of the light fog that hung over the cypress-tops, a flock of gray-black forms rose like an erratic balloon in a vortex, honking, shrilling, excited.

Phil found their appearance further cause for grumbling.

"Think what we could do with a double-barreled shotgun and a dog," he said, his tone vexed.

Hugh looked at him in some surprise. In the three days they had already spent at Goose Inlet, a certain antagonism had developed in Philip

Bemis that Hugh had never before seen, even in the most trying experiences they had shared together.

There did not seem much excuse for it, and Hugh was grieved at the lack of appreciation it showed; for were they not employed?—wasn't there a chance for making quite a considerable sum? Meanwhile, wasn't there the camp-fire, the warm blankets, the untainted air, the rolling sea—and Donna!

A sudden suspicion, the first he had had, smote Hugh. Was Phil daring to do what he had denied himself? Selfridge had made it plain that Donna was to be his son's wife, and until he no longer owed Selfridge service, Hugh was determined to keep faith with him.

It was difficult, too, with that silent, frail little girl moving about uncomplainingly, an unpaid servant, expected by her stepfather to perform the hardest tasks speedily; grumbled and sworn at when she was doing her best, and ignored when menial services were not required. In his heart, Hugh had grown to hate old Selfridge, his greed, his unholy pride, and his contempt for others; but he had addressed no words to Donna which held sympathy, preferring to show his feelings by taking off her hands all the harder labor of the camp.

Until now, the fact that Phil was eager to forestall him in this he had laid down to the natural love which Phil had for him; but now he remembered that Phil had been actually ill-natured when Hugh had managed to wake before him this morning and finish the chopping of the wood before Donna was more than half awake, and, as a reward, had had her all to himself, swimming far out to sea with her, exulting in the chill of the morning.

What a picture she had made, bending over the fire, wrapped to the chin in a heavy woolen robe, crimson of hue; her drying hair loose about her shoulders, her great eyes for the moment denuded of tragedy and smiling gratitude at Hugh! And such had been the picture when Phil awakened.

He had been ill-natured ever since.

"See here, Bemis," said Hugh suddenly, knocking the ashes from his pipe to the moss and grinding them out with

his heel, "what's the matter with you these days?"

The use of his surname acted upon Phil as a douche of cold water. Hugh had not so addressed him in years. After the shock of it, a sullenness resulted.

"I dunno what you mean, Coates," he replied, emphasizing the unfamiliar form of address. "What *do* you mean?"

There was an absence of honesty in the glances that were exchanged, and both felt it. Hugh was the stronger of the two, therefore the first to relent.

"Oh, come, pal," he said kindly, "there's been a cloud between us lately—look there!"

With the waning afternoon, the fog over the cypresses and white birches grew heavier. Now the sea-mist was rolling in great patches toward the trembling reeds and the quaking mud, and soon the white of the birches could no longer be seen.

"We don't want it to get like that," remarked Hugh at length. "It's just a little cloud yet, old boy!"

"I tell you I don't know what you're talking about," returned Phil stubbornly. "You're always getting ideas into your head like that. Why can't you leave me alone?"

He looked away, snarling almost, for Hugh's glance was both hurt and reproachful, and his. "Phil!" was charged with an emotion that the recipient resented, for he knew himself to be in the wrong. Vaguely, however, he felt that he had been ill-treated. Here he was, lying out here under the sky, smoking and doing nothing to anybody, and Hugh had to deliver him a lecture!

"If it's about Donna, Phil—" said Hugh tentatively after a long pause.

"If what's about Donna?" shouted the other, tearing his soft hat from his blond head and jumping up excitedly. "If what's about Donna? Good Lord, Hugh, cut it out! You make me tired! You'll be telling me I'm crazy about her next. Yes, and—"

"And—aren't you?" interrogated Hugh hopefully.

"No, I'm not," returned Phil with an oath, and started away. But there

was something so forlorn about Hugh's position as he stood staring after, that the heart of his friend melted, and back he came, with his hat on again and both hands outstretched.

"Don't let's quarrel, Hugh," he said, his tone slightly quavering. "After all, we've only got one another. But—Well, I've been out of sorts—something—a touch of liver maybe. Oh, the deuce! forgive me, old fellow."

And again they filled pipes out of the same pouch and smoked in silence. But the question Hugh had asked about Donna remained still a question, and both men knew it.

Phil would have liked to know whether Hugh cared for the girl. His standard of honor was not quite as high as his dark-haired friend's; he was gayer of nature and more easily depressed. The fact that Selfridge's son was Donna's affianced was of no moment to him.

But Hugh's attitude—that was different. It had hurt him sorely to see Hugh looking forlorn. No matter how much he cared for a girl—"no matter how much," he repeated firmly to himself—he would not hurt Hugh.

From which it will be seen that Master Phil was slightly prone to the dramatic; whereas Hugh had not one theatrical impulse. He saw no grandeur in any action which was a mere matter of fair dealing with a friend; no beauty in a sacrifice made for one he loved.

He went to the theater seldom, because he was never in tune with the high lights of emotions. To him there was never a question of swerving from what he thought to be the right thing to do. He saw no need to get emotional over doing the right thing.

But Phil would be sure to make an impressive spectacle out of a sacrifice!

Yet, Phil was the more lovable of the two, where ninety-nine out of a hundred people were concerned. He was light-hearted, while Hugh was inclined to be contemplative; he would loan a dollar to the most casual acquaintance, and neglect to pay back his best friend. Phil's friends always suffered financially for their friendship; Hugh, most of all.

Hugh would have denied his friend, his sweetheart, or his mother nothing—but the casual borrower would have gone away with empty pockets; for, where Hugh's emotions were not touched, he was colder than the heart of a hotelkeeper.

And now, as he stared away at the long breakers that rose, fleece-like and foamy, on the teeth of the inlying rocks, a feeling of desolation overcame him. He was sure that the little dark girl with the hair like silk and the eyes of tragedy was necessary to his happiness. Yet, between him and her lay as many rocks as separated the breakers from the beach.

So absorbed was he that he did not see her coming. As for Phil, he lay with his face to the moss, staring at the fog on the swamp.

She came toward the silent ones, her hair heavy with the sea-mist, little salt-jewels upon her long lashes framing the eyes of tragedy; came along in her little rough shoes and coarse stockings, but with the grace of the wind itself in her swaying walk, and sat down, silent as ever, beside Hugh, staring also at the sea.

Phil's head had sunk down to the moss and he slept, the breeze riffling his blond hair. The girl put a rough little hand forward, like a tame animal not sure that it pleases its master, and the rough little hand played with the blond hair.

It was an instinctive action, holding neither love nor affection in it, simply a desire to make a toy of a living thing. But the scowl upon Hugh's face caused her to withdraw the hand quickly and look away.

She was rather pleased that Hugh should scowl. She was only seventeen, and the knowledge that her actions could influence the thoughts of strong men thrilled her strangely. She wished suddenly that Phil would awake and see her caress Hugh's hair. Would he be angry, too?

She did not make any excuse to Hugh—merely lifted a pathetic little face.

The girl's charm was accentuated by her peculiar quality of silence. Down in her elf-like brain, she dreamed strange things—things big, wonderful,

soul-stirring; and some strength of intuition told her that the words that came to her lips expressed none of these things.

She was a witch, in her way, with a spell of atmosphere, a spell seldom broken by chatter. Her eyes spoke for her.

To Hugh she always turned the face of one who needs protection. This very morning, out in the water, she had pretended once or twice to be out of breath, when in reality her sturdy little lungs were like those of a seal. But Hugh had liked to swim with one arm about her, and she had given him the chance.

Hugh was bigger than Phil, and she liked that bigness. But then Phil told her funny stories, and made a capital stock of fun out of her stepfather, and also made her heart glad with imitations of the face in the cabinet-photograph which old Selfridge intended to be that of the father of the future Selfridges.

She had confessed something to Phil this morning. It occurred to her to find out how Hugh would take it.

"I don't want to marry Horace," she said suddenly and just as simply as the words stand written, except for a certain plaintive note that always accompanied the face she turned to Hugh.

"I wouldn't tell anybody but you," she added hastily, with a glance at Phil, sleeping. "Don't say anything to him."

It would be unjust to Donna to say that she did such things as this from any motive save that of a desire to please the person to whom she talked and to prop up her growing belief in her own importance. In these latter days, there had been no one in the house save old men and women, who took little notice of her save to disparage the ripe tints of her skin and the "boldness" of her eyes.

Donna was a beauty of a warmer clime; the blood of Spain was in her veins; Spanish blood that had kept pure for three generations under the hot Central American sun. She was the daughter of an attaché of the Salvador consulate by his marriage to Margaret Hoskin, a patient, ox-eyed, self-denying woman who had once nursed Señor Ruiz during a serious illness.

Donna's life during her father's time had been enlivened by gay, well-dressed gentlemen who often took her for walks on Fifth Avenue, and let her stop in Raquin's with them, and drink grenadine and other sirups, while they chatted over affairs under the tropic sky.

Hernano Ruiz had been a "spender," like all his race, and with his death, Donna fell from the glory of rainbow-tinted waistcoated gentlemen until, after Madam Ruiz's marriage to Selfridge, she degenerated into a lodging-house "slavey."

She was typically feudal in her impressions. Men had always had the right to place women where they wished—according to her mother. But a realization of her own beauty was growing stronger every day, and it gave her little warm thrills of pride to think that, such as she was, she was able to influence just such men as she remembered in her days of strolling on Fifth Avenue.

She had often thought that it was very nice to own a gentleman with a brave waistcoat and an easy way of telling other people to bring him and his friends things to eat and drink, and not looking at the money that was given him in change.

"Maybe," said Hugh with a brave effort, "maybe you're too young to know just exactly whom you do want to marry."

"Oh, I know," she returned with a little, wise shake of the head and an upward glance that set wild thoughts at liberty in his well-ordered brain. "I know."

She got remarkable effects with the few words she used, but she was a plagiarist. She had used exactly the same words and the same glance and the same gesture with Phil in the morning. Now she was disappointed in the effect.

Phil had come closer to her and taken her hand, and besought her to tell him just who it was that she knew to be the desired director of her destinies. Hugh did no such things. He only seemed vaguely troubled. Also, he looked away from her.

She sighed.

"Oh, Donna," cried Hugh suddenly, and turned eyes on her that even a tyro like herself knew for yearning eyes.

Primitive herself, she could not understand the motives that held him back. In reality, she was not quite sure what she wanted him to do, or how it would affect her, if he declared himself as the man she wanted.

Phil was nice, too! What she chiefly wanted was sympathy in her affliction; the affliction of being turned over to a youth who was insufferably masterful without reason for being so. Even Donna's youth permitted her to understand that Selfridge's worship of young Horace was founded on a fallacy.

It was most irksome to her to think that she should do rough housework in order that this unprepossessing hobbledohoy might live like a gentleman at college.

Donna only knew one kind of gentleman—those of the rainbow-tinted waistcoats and the easy way of spending money, and to this class young Selfridge did not belong.

"You see, Donna," Hugh finally brought himself to say, "any man who married you, and made you throw over Selfridge's son, would be working a hardship on you, unless you were several years older and knew that your love for him outweighed all other considerations. From what your stepfather tells me, the fortune that's buried round here amounts to something like three or four hundred thousand dollars.

"Now, that will buy a beautiful house and provide you with servants and a maid to take care of your hair and manicure your fingers, and a motor-car to ride in, and a thousand and one more things that all pretty girls think are their due. You would have to love a man a great deal to give up all those things willingly.

"Don't you see, if you married anybody else, you'd be bound to poverty, practically, all your life. That is, if—well, in the case of an average man like Hugh Coates or Phil Bemis. That's what I mean."

Donna opened her round eyes very wide.

"But I should have the half of the treasure," she said slowly.

Hugh smiled.

"That's not the way I understand it, Donna," he returned. "You see, Mr. Selfridge is very proud of the position his family once held in these parts. His idea in digging up this treasure, as I understand it, is not so much for himself as for the sake of the family name. He wants to put it on the basis it was before the Civil War.

"Up there"—and he waved his hand to indicate a space far beyond the swamp—"up there lies Selfridge Hall, that is now in ruins, or something very much like that. Mr. Selfridge intends to—"

"I know that," said the girl impatiently; "but the treasure is to be divided between Horace and me. It was to have been divided between mama and Mr. Selfridge."

Hugh shrugged his shoulders.

"You evidently don't take your father's consuming passion very seriously," he returned; "but I'll tell you this. You'd better not let him hear you say you don't intend to marry Horace. Because, if you do, he'll probably send you out in the world to make your own living."

In spite of the serious thoughts that this brought to the girl's mind, she could not overlook the chance for coquetting.

"And what should I do, then?" she asked.

"Why—"

The words were at Hugh's lips, his arms were curved forward as though to take her slim body between them, when Phil woke and, raising himself on his elbow, saw the look and the gesture. There was a scowl on his face.

The girl looked from one to the other, and then away, for delight had come into her eyes—the natural pride of the woman over whom two men are about to quarrel.

But a long, snarling cry interrupted the situation, and Donna sprang to her feet.

"He's awake," she cried. "I'll have to run and cook some supper."

The two men followed slowly, neither speaking.

Finally Phil, knocking the ashes from his pipe with a quick gesture,

sprang ahead, and left his companion alone in the silence of monotonous sounds.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RED NECKLACE.

THERE is no particular virtue in keeping one's body clean, if one inhabits a room with a bath attached. The truly cleanly man or woman must be sought for in places where the taking of a bath is accompanied by painful preparation. Old Selfridge could not be so classified. Since the arrival of the party at Goose Inlet, no water had touched his face, nor had he changed a single article of clothing; sleeping, eating, and digging for treasure in a suit of corduroys and a flannel shirt purchased in the first instance from a second-hand store on Sixth Avenue, and much in need of the cleaner's skill then.

He had been sleeping all day, for, in spite of the fact that Goose Inlet was miles from any human being, he clung to the belief that his uncle of Selfridge Hall was on the alert for trespassers on his property.

Therefore he quitted the camp after supper each night, and, getting into the canoe, paddled up the inlet and disappeared into the swamp, where, with a tape-measure, a compass, and a foot-rule, he went about the little islet up there, following the directions given on the map of the piratical privateersman. For three nights he had been so employed, returning in a surly mood at daybreak, waking up Donna, eating breakfast, and sleeping during the day. As the girl ran breathless at his call, he glared at her and called for food.

The little cove with the shelving beach was ideally suited to the party, for the early October weather was mild, and the sea-breezes were warded off by the rock wall. Hugh and Phil had constructed a couple of "lean-tos," one for Donna and one for the men, and had spent some time cutting down young saplings and firs to protect the motor-car from rain. So that, with the evening shadows on the place, and the little fire crackling violet and orange, the place had the atmosphere and smell of Christmas cheer.

Hugh lounged in before Phil and lay on the sands near Selfridge, watching the girl as she busied herself with frying-pan and coffee-pot, the red glow on her dark face as he had first seen it that night on Orton Street.

He turned occasionally as a harsh word from Selfridge recalled that person to his mind. Hugh stared at the dirty old man offensively.

His white beard was stained; he had put on a mud-caked hat and taken it off, leaving some of the clay clinging to his bristly skull, and his little eyes were half hidden by their red rims. A sullen devil was fast growing to life in Hugh's mind, as he pictured young Selfridge developing into such a man.

The girl understood, and threw him appealing glances.

Deliberately Hugh turned to the old man.

"As I understand it, sir," he said in a calm, smooth voice, "one-twenty-fifth of the treasure belongs to Mr. Bemis, and another twenty-fifth to me. After that the money is to be equally divided between your son and Miss Donna. Am I right?"

"Divided?" growled Selfridge, looking up. "What's to be divided?"

"The money from the treasure," replied Hugh suavely.

Selfridge turned his back upon him.

"There never was any question of division," he snarled.

And then, as Phil's approaching footsteps caused him to turn and put a hand to the pocket that held a weapon:

"Don't you be putting foolish notions into the girl's head. She's lucky enough as it is. She has no claim on this money. It's Selfridge money—my money. I'd look fine dividing it with somebody, now wouldn't I? It's money to buy Selfridge Hall with.

"What's a little shrimp of a girl got to do with that? I'm giving her the chance to be the mother of my son's children—of the new Selfridge family. And all because she's Margaret's daughter. Not for her own sake, the sulky little brute."

He glared at Donna, waving his hand. "Oh, you think you're ill-treated—ill-treated!"

He fell to muttering, letting the sand

trickle between his fingers. Donna went about her work as though she had not been the subject of conversation, saying nothing until she had fried the ham and the potatoes and taken the coffee off the crooked stick.

Then she warmed the agateware cups and plates and spread four or five Japanese napkins on a flat rock so as to make a table-cloth.

"Supper's ready," she announced.

There was no word of conversation during the meal, except frequent requests from the old man for more food and drink. Hugh and Phil resolutely avoided the gaze of each other, Donna kept her eyes on the fire, the old man had his fixed on his plate.

With his little eyes, his bristly head, and his thick neck, Hugh was continually reminded of a fatted porker bending over a trough. He had grown to hate Selfridge.

Had he been given the faculty of looking impartially upon himself, it would have been flashed upon him that his attitude was ridiculous. Selfridge had taken him from poverty and given him the chance to make a small fortune; also, it was through Selfridge that he had met Donna. But Hugh was in love, and he saw only the little dark girl staring at the fire.

She had cleared away the supper-things by now, washed them in the stream, and returned to the warm sands. The quiet was unbroken, save for the final flap of gull wings as the birds settled down in the nooks and crannies of the overhead rocks; and as for the sea, that great rolling murmur was only the soother of silence, except when an unruly little whitecap sent a snowlike streamer through the teeth of inlying rocks.

Selfridge sat bolt upright, seeming to count the grains of sand that trickled through his fingers, and the night spread and spread until even the whitecaps of the waves were no longer distinguishable through the gloom of the sea-mist.

Presently the old man rose, and, with no word, went to the edge of the creek and pushed the canoe into the water, a lighted lantern in his hand. They heard the splash, and, after the gurgle caused by the sharp nose of the canvas craft cutting the quiet water, the silence fell

again, and the two men and the girl watched the rays of light fall on the black current on either side until finally it was no more than a pin-point of radiance that went out like the last glow of a burned match.

"Are you superstitious, Donna?" asked Hugh suddenly.

"You're thinking about the ruby necklace," was her unexpected reply. The girl was weirdly intuitive, such a person as mediums desire when they make "tests" for people worth while convincing. It was not, therefore, strange that she should have intercepted the thought-current, which ran more swiftly than the fire burned.

Hazily it had occurred to Hugh that if Selfridge died, Donna would be willing to marry him, for then she would have the half share of the treasure and must needs deny herself none of the pretty things she must crave.

To Phil it appeared that the ruby necklace might cause Selfridge's death before he had unearthed the remainder of the treasure, in which case all the money would be Donna's except a small annuity that they would allow the flabby-faced boy along with the necklace itself, which might do for him what it had done for his father.

As for Hugh—he wondered if Hugh could be persuaded to touch the necklace. Hugh was unfair.

No reason came to Phil's mind why he should harbor such a thought against his chum, and this angered him the more. Hugh was underhanded; that was it—he was underhanded.

And so the two passions—greed for gold and love for woman, the only real passions found in the breast of every human—had changed two lovable boys into men who looked upon the death of a fellow creature lightly.

The desire for wealth could, by itself, have worked no such transformation; but each knew in his heart that he could not hope to keep this woman by love alone. She must have love, and other things, too. And up there in the swamp was the gold that would buy the other things.

The three eyed one another—Phil and Hugh in something like consternation; the girl in a satisfied, silent, smiling way.

"What about the ruby necklace?" asked Phil hoarsely.

It was one thing to jeer about old wives' tales when in the midst of the sordid commonplace—the stone-topped tables, the saucy waitresses, the thundering "L," and the whirring trolley-cars. But down on a lonely beach with a crackling fire and a quiet sea, the shadows dwindling and lessening on the sand, and the flap of wings overhead—there was a chance of seeing the pirate schooner, the dying woman, the curse, and the knife-thrust here.

"I was wondering," said Hugh, as one in a daze hears himself talk—"I was wondering if that necklace wasn't, in some way, a sort of guard for the treasure. Whether—whether—it wasn't one of those things given back to earth with an invisible guardian.

"Out in China there is a temple containing wealth beyond reason. It has four doors—silver, iron, copper, gold—and the tradition is that when a door was completed, a priest killed himself that his soul might pass into the watching dragon painted on the door."

"What a fool you are!" cried Phil, shivering, nevertheless, as the shadows of the flapping birds above swelled into vampire size with the uproaring flames.

The girl alone seemed unmoved. She was like a salamander, finding the fire all sufficient, sitting so close to it that the red tongues of it seemed to lick her face without searing it. The orange-and-violet flames had died away now, and the fire was red and burning before her like an altar-flame to a blood-stained goddess.

Queer sounds seemed to come from rocks and water, swamp and marsh-land. Perhaps it was only the splash of a wild duck, the swish of the swaying reeds, or the groaning of a white birch before a gust of gale-driven sea-mist. As silently as ever, the girl prepared for rest and went within her lean-to, dropping the bark curtain before it.

Phil, glancing about uneasily, took out his revolver, snapped it open, poured out the cartridges, and tested it. Hugh, for want of something better to do, removed its mate from the holster slung under his arm. The firelight licked them greedily, handsome weapons of blue steel, a monogram sprawled on the butt of each.

When Phil, without a word of good night, went within the lean-to they shared with Selfridge, Hugh was still polishing the revolver with a handkerchief and seeing pictures in the fire—red pictures.

Presently the weapon dropped from his fingers to the warm sand and he let it lay, hardly knowing it was there. The girl, wondering at the silence, saw him as she peeped out, sitting bolt upright and staring, staring, yet seeing nothing.

Somehow, it seemed that the night was too quiet.

A faint tremble assailed the darkness. A feather of gray spread itself upon the cap of night.

A great castle with turrets of pearl thrust itself above the mountain of mist, and in the fresh dawn the geese dived into the marsh-pools and gemmed the moss with the splashing drops.

Phil awoke and, as had been his custom for years, reached out a hand to awaken Hugh. But Hugh was not there.

He struck a match and lit a candle. Hugh's bed of pine-boughs lay untouched, the blankets spread above it. Phil put out his head and looked at the new-born day with its pearls of salt spray on the bushes and the pink radiance above the swamp. The fire burned on the beach a pale amber, almost unobscured and unnoticeable in the stronger light of dawn.

And close to its embers Hugh slept.

The fact smote Phil with a sense of injustice. He came out of the lean-to, and stood watching the sleeping man's face. Hugh was not enwrapped in peaceful slumber; a scowl on his features, taken in conjunction with a smear of charred wood just above his right cheekbone, gave his face a sinister appearance. The scowl was duplicated on Phil's face as he turned away.

It occurred to him now that Selfridge had not returned from his nocturnal search. The canoe was not on the shelving beach; his bed of pine-boughs also was untouched. Undoubtedly, he had found the treasure, then, and could not bear to leave it.

Phil set about chopping wood for a fresh fire, opening cans of condensed food, and preparing the coffee. Still

Hugh and Donna slept. He stripped off his clothes and got into his bathing-trunks and jersey, plunging into the surf and swimming far out beyond the breakers. The battle with the waves set him all atingle, and when he returned he found that Donna was moving about the fire and Hugh was talking earnestly with her.

Changing his wet clothes, he joined the breakfast circle, which was as moody as that of the last supper, and, with it over, observed curtly that it seemed to him that the absence of old Selfridge wanted looking into.

"Oh, let him alone," said Hugh carelessly, as he went into the lean-to to change into his bathing-suit. "He knows where the camp is, and it's up to him to find it."

"You go," was Donna's remark. "I'm too busy with these things. I'd put on my wading-boots, though. He says there isn't any path into the swamp."

Phil buckled on the high boots, felt for his revolver, and went off, while Hugh advanced gingerly toward the sea. Donna was singing a little Spanish song.

No one seemed worried about the old man but Phil. And why he should be worried he did not know.

But all during the night the ruby necklace had possessed him, filled his dreams, brought him half a dozen times to the scream of waking. A premonition, heavy, lead-colored, depressing, hung over him. The swamp was suddenly a thing of evil and mystery.

Donna had been right about the path. As he drew away from the camp, the moss began to disappear and the soil squirted up in little jets under his feet. A little ahead he saw tiny water-holes. He advanced to the creek-bed, where the water came up to his hips, and waded on past the curve and out of sight of the camp.

Here the inlet became very narrow and much deeper. The water rose over his hips and soaked him above the waist. He was about to draw back when he saw, caught among the roots of a great weeping-willow tree, the canoe. He advanced.

The water got no deeper, but the bed sank beneath him. He managed to reach for one of the roots and drew himself forward, his chin coming just over the gunwale of the canvas boat.

He started, screamed like a woman, and caught the gunwale, capsizing the canoe.

He seemed to have lost the power of movement as he sank below the surface of the water, blinded, helpless. He came to the surface, striking out, but not to save his life, only to push away from him something that was horrible, something that threatened him with an unclean terror.

Again he sank.

In his terror he had forgotten that the water was not above his head, and the fear of death threw out the mental dread. He struck out furiously now, his lungs stifled as he fought for existence in four feet of water, till the kindly current caught him and swept him to shore, just below the bend of the creek and upon firm soil again, where he lay unconscious.

And that same current bore another body ahead of him—the body of an old man.

But him it did not leave unconscious, nor so far from the camp. Indeed, it washed it to the feet of Donna, who was bending over the breakfast dishes.

And she stood back, looking at it, when Hugh came from the sea, dashing the spray from his eyes.

He followed the girl's gaze.

There was a red spot on old Selfridge's head and a red necklace clasped in his stiffened fingers.

CHAPTER V.

THE MURDERER'S WEAPON.

To look upon the body of a man foully murdered is to see oneself struck down by a treacherous hand.

The man who speaks callously of murder has never witnessed one. The call for vengeance the sight evokes is not love for the dead man, but the instinct of animal self-preservation.

If Selfridge had been murdered, then so would he, Hugh Coates, be murdered.

"The treasure," said Hugh suddenly.

The girl shook her head, pointing to the necklace.

"You see," she said simply, "there was something in it, after all."

Hugh shook his head and pointed in turn to the red spot on the old man's right temple.

"Ghosts don't use revolvers," he said. "The man who did this knew the story. He killed him for the treasure. He hasn't had time to remove it yet. He's in that swamp now, and I'm going to find him."

He started toward the canoe, but changed his mind.

"He can spot me in that. It takes a good man to hit another one who is swimming."

And, with palms together, he shot into the water and swam up Goose Inlet. He had not far to go before the body of Phil on the sands brought him back to shore, and he bent over his chum.

Reassured by the beat of his heart, and afraid to linger longer lest his quarry escape, Hugh swam on up the creek until he was breasting the swift current that came out of the black swamp, brushing his cheeks against the rushes.

The air was that of stormy twilight, and very chill.

Smooth green trunks, old with the moisture of ages, rose pillar-like about the stream, girdled by thickets of canes and tall reeds; great boughs stretched out to protect the inky mirror from the sun, boughs from which long tendrils hung, swaying in the cold breath of the swamp.

Dim white flowers starred the darkness, clinging to boughs and trunks, and the creeping vines seemed like ghostly hands reached out to prevent the hardy swimmer from penetrating the secret they had shielded so long.

The stillness was such that Hugh seemed to hear the very breath of silence.

He had been swimming for some time before he saw a light burning ahead of him—a single, lonely light, that flowered the blackness round about with yellow blooms.

Softly he swam, circling the islet, keeping outside the zone of the lantern's rays. But he heard no voice, no sound.

Emboldened, he came to land, and his naked feet sank into the soft, marshy earth. Still the silence was unbroken.

Hugh stood stock-still, almost afraid to draw his breath. What if, after all, the ruby necklace was— But, no!—that was all very well before the man died. But now!

Still, it was not hard to believe, under that cathedral dome of darkness, standing beside that inky mirror that ran so swiftly, yet seemed as still as the grave. Even the birds and wild fowl that dwelt within the swamp shadows by night would have none of its unnatural dark by day. It was a thing accursed, set apart—the house of the dead.

He came forward, step by step, until he had picked up the lantern. And now a faint halloo from afar turned him sick with fear. Looking quickly about in the lantern's rays, he seemed to see a newly dug grave. The lantern dropped from his fingers. He fell to his knees.

But as he fell, he saw the light shine upon golden coin, and knew that what he had taken for a grave was the discovered hiding-place of the treasure that had once belonged to a Selfridge.

He reached over, picked up the lantern again, and thrust his free hand deep into the hole, letting it play about to the tune of chinking gold.

Now the halloo came again, long, repeated. It was the voice of Phil.

"Hal-loo!" called back Hugh. "Halloo—halloo!"

"All right?" sung out the voice again.

"All right."

He heard the plashing of the canoe-paddle, and stepped to the shore of the islet, the lantern in his hand. And like a gray ghost the light boat shot out of the blackness.

"No one here?" asked Phil as he dragged Donna over the marsh.

"No one," answered Hugh. "The lantern was still burning. The treasure's dug up."

He led them to the place he had taken for a grave, and where the lantern-light now fell upon rows of rotten canvas bags, belching forth their precious contents into the great oaken chest in which they lay.

"The necklace must have been on top," said Donna, catching a hand of each.

"Bah!" said Phil Bemis. His tone was strangely harsh. "What we want to look for is the imprint of boot-heels. There were two men on this island last night. One of them killed the other. He'll have left his mark."

He took the lantern from Hugh's hand, and with it circled the tiny islet. Donna drew closer to Hugh.

"You're cold," she said. "Get into the canoe and go back to the camp and change into some warm things."

"The body?" interrogated Hugh, turning to Donna.

"It floated out to sea," she replied, shuddering a little. "A wave caught it. And I was afraid to touch the necklace. Did I do wrong in letting it go? It and that terrible necklace? I—I was afraid!"

Hugh put his arm about her.

"Poor little thing!" he said, and stood so when Phil flashed the light again upon them.

"Find anything, Phil?"

Bemis scowled and shook his head.

"Did you know," he asked slowly, "that I found the body?"

"You found it?" interrogated Hugh in surprise. "You found it? Why, Donna and I—"

"I know," replied Phil. "I was wading up the creek. I—it scared me. I overturned the canoe. That's the worst of it. There might have been some evidence in it, and now it's in the bottom of the creek."

He paused and set down the lantern on the ground.

"Go back to the camp and change your clothes," said Donna imperatively, catching Hugh's hand. "And bring back your revolver with you. Mr. Bemis's cartridges are wet. His" (it was evident that she spoke of Selfridge) "we can't find at all. Hurry now!"

"Yes," said Phil; "and meanwhile we'll have some of this stuff piled up for you to take back. I want to get away from this place. Oh, no!—not the island—the whole infernal business. I—oh, go ahead, will you?"

He unloosened Donna's hand from Hugh's and pushed him toward the canoe. Hugh picked up the paddle, noting that it was an extra one that they had kept in camp, and pushed off. Phil knelt

down and lifted one of the money-bags—the gold pieces poured out of it.

"Say," he yelled after Hugh, "bring all those sacks of burlap, will you? These bags are no good."

"All right," sang out Hugh from down the creek.

Donna settled herself within the circle of light, head between her palms, staring at Phil as he lifted sack after sack, only to have it burst in his hands. An incautious movement of hers overturned the lantern for a moment, and he rushed to its rescue before the flame went out.

"Oh, Phil, I'm awfully sorry!" she said.

It was the first time she had called him Phil. A great wave of tenderness overcame him at the thought of this little girl so utterly alone and unprotected in the world; and he would have caught her in his arms had not a certain instinctive feeling told him that she was as much in need of protection from him as from any one else.

And here, on the islet alone with her, he was her guardian.

So with no word he went back to his unprofitable task of lifting the rotten bags. Another burst; and as he reached for yet another, his hand closed on something larger than a gold piece, and he drew it out—a revolver of blue steel, its butt monogrammed.

He stared at it as one would an asp upon the breast of a loved one. For the moment he believed himself the victim of an hallucination. With dry lips and parched tongue, he stared, his mouth open, his eyes dilated.

It couldn't be true!

He turned his head as mechanically as though he were an automaton. Donna was sunk in deep meditation, seeing nothing.

With a quick movement, he threw the revolver open. One cartridge had been used.

The revolver dropped into the pocket of his wet coat. He, too, caught his head between his palms.

And so the two sat in the light of the lantern, under the cathedral dome of gloom, in the twilight of the silent swamp. Before them lay wealth so great that their minds were incapable of grasping its significance—loons and doub-

loons, sovereigns and eagles, reals and Napoleons—below them other chests with great ingots of gold and silver; hidden between them, bags containing precious stones.

Yet neither seemed to heed; both were as silent as the swamp itself, the spell of devil's magic upon them. And so Hugh found them when he sprang ashore again in his corduroys and boots.

He threw some sacking at Phil's feet.

"Well, come on, old fellow," he said. "We'd better be getting some of this stuff down to the camp. You and I'll have to make a lot of trips, though. That canoe won't hold a lot besides one person."

"You didn't find your revolver, did you?" asked Phil, turning slowly.

"No. I'm blessed if I know what happened to it. I had it in my hand when I went to sleep last night."

"I should think," said Phil still very slowly, "that the loss of it would worry you a good deal, with a murderer about who's liable to put a bullet into any one or all of us at any minute."

"It does worry me," replied Hugh; "I wanted especially to tell you to dry out your gun. I brought some fresh cartridges for you."

He exhibited a handful to Phil.

"You're sort of careless of your own weapons, aren't you?" Phil returned.

He took the revolver he had found from his coat-pocket and handed it silently to Hugh.

"I took yours by mistake," he said. "There it is."

"Oh, thanks!" said Hugh.

Phil was in the light, Hugh in semi-darkness. The latter leaned forward and looked at his weapon.

"It's damp," he said.

"I've had it in my pocket."

Hugh snapped it open just as Phil had done, and the cartridges fell into his hand.

"Why," he said suddenly, "why—why, one's missing."

"Yes," replied Phil. "One's missing."

Their eyes met. Phil was glaring at him. For a moment Hugh gaped open-mouthed. Then suddenly hate came into his eyes, too.

The girl seemed to awake.

"I'm cold," she said. "I'm cold. Won't you take me back to the camp?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE TEST.

THE canoe sagged under its freight when the second sack was added, and Phil motioned Donna to enter, following her and paddling off. Hugh was again alone on the island.

His friend! His pal! His chum! A murderer and a coward! Phil had discovered the body, Phil had stolen his revolver so that it might be proven that he, Hugh Coates, had committed the crime, unless Hugh was willing to keep his secret. And so he thought to marry Donna and thus gain the treasure?

He was willing to do murder for the stuff—willing to sacrifice that little girl to gain the right to call the gold his own.

Hugh jerked the revolver out of his pocket.

Yes, it was his own—his very own. They had bought them at the same time in a little gunshop on Kearney Street in the days when they went down to San Francisco, flushed with temporary success. There was the monogram sprawled over the butt.

Donna had seen Phil hand it back to him. If he, Hugh, accused Phil of the murder, Phil might say he had found the revolver anywhere he chose. He claimed to have first seen the body of the murdered man; it would be easy to say that this revolver lay near the body.

And he could pretend that only solicitude for his friend prevented him from accusing him of the crime.

He could ruin him with the one person in all the world that his heart desired—Donna! He could make Donna believe that he, Hugh, was a murderer unless Hugh gave tacit consent to his carrying out his trick—unless Hugh kept silent and made no attempt to win her.

How careful Phil had been to give him back that revolver while Donna listened! How deliberately he had stated that it was he who first saw the body! How devilishly he had insinuated that a cartridge had been used!

And he, Hugh—what alibi had he? He had been seen late the night before

with the revolver in his hand. In the morning he had forgotten all about it, did not know what had happened to it until Phil had handed it back.

He saw the hopeless sophistry of the explanation. No, Phil had contrived it well—had contrived it *so* well that if Hugh accused him, he would not only be able to pretend innocence, but also would get a great deal of credit for attempting to shield his friend. It would make a hero of him in Donna's eyes—that miserable rat of a Phil!

Murderer, thief, betrayer! Must he stand aside and see him win the thing he prized above all others?

The minutes dragged like days. Feverishly, Hugh set to work to fill the other sacks that lay by the open hole, and soon the canoe was back bearing only Phil. Hugh loaded in four of the sacks, and bade Phil continue the work while he took his turn at the paddle. And out of the swamp he went, and back to the camp where Donna was oiling the machinery of the motor-car.

"Oh, isn't that enough? Can't you go back and get Mr. Bemis and let us all get away from here?"

The girl's tone was appealing. Hugh looked dazedly at the motor-car, then at her. A sudden suspicion smote him.

"Did Phil tell you to go to work on that?" he asked abruptly. "Did he suggest it?"

"Why, yes," she replied, opening her eyes in wonder; "he said to have it all ready so that, when we had all the treasure in it we can crowd in, we can get away from here. Don't you want to go, too, Hugh?"

He nodded.

"Yes, yes, yes," he kept repeating. "Yes, yes, yes."

Overhead a sea-gull screamed a requiem to the lonely body that floated on the waste of waters—or, at least, the bird's melancholy cry so came to Hugh's ears.

So treachery was to be piled on treachery? On Phil's last trip down he would carry off the girl, the car, the treasure, and leave his erstwhile friend on the little islet where the other man had met his death.

"I'll see," said Hugh. "And *he'll* see."

The girl noted him muttering, but said nothing. As she turned away, he crossed to the motor and removed the ignition-plug.

"They can't start without that," he thought as he put it in his pocket. "And I'll have the satisfaction of knowing just how much of a rat he can be."

He stepped back into the canoe, though every impulse within him called out to warn the girl and to beg her for himself. Maybe she expected it, too, for her eyes were wistful as she watched the canoe round the bend and pass out of sight again.

She seemed very small to be lifting those heavy sacks into the vehicle that was to take them back to civilization. But she did it with apparent ease. Not for worlds would she have exposed that strength of muscle to her companions.

Nor was she frightened; though murder had been done near by, she, in the open, with all that treasure to guard and every reason to believe the killer of Selfridge lurked in the vicinity, did not even turn her head in case the criminal should be approaching.

Something of this attitude came to Hugh's mind as he paddled back to the islet. Poor little girl—her simple primitive faith was touching! She really believed in the legend of the red necklace—had such faith in the power of the curse that no thought of a mortal hand occurred to her. He doubted if she would believe that he had committed the murder, even if Phil accused him. She was so young—so innocent!

As the dark shadows of the swamp encompassed him again, the devil of hatred, begotten by love, possessed Hugh. He had begun to see good in evil, justifying his revengeful thoughts by excuses which concerned her welfare.

Was it right that he should even give Phil the chance to convince her? Phil was good-looking, and other women had cared greatly for him. Donna was young; knew little of men. It was exceedingly probable that she loved Phil, and only waited for him to declare himself.

In that case, she would believe implicitly all he said, and nothing that Hugh could do would convince her of her error.

He remembered the revolver in his pocket. Phil's was wet. They would be alone in the swamp. Wasn't there an old biblical saying to justify him—"An eye for an eye"? The law took such offenders as Phil and hung them. Down here there was no law, except that which men made for themselves. Was it right for him to let Phil go on his evil way?

But when the canoe grounded on the islet and he saw Phil bending over the chest of gold, the revolver slipped back into his pocket. No matter what justification, he couldn't shoot his old pal. A thousand little incidents rushed back to him—incidents of self-sacrifice and kindness on the other's part.

There was that time in Death Valley when the water gave out and Phil pretended to have a full flask when Hugh offered to share his last drink. And Phil's flask had been as empty as a gourd.

He had tried to hide it, too, as the hours passed, and perhaps Hugh would never have known had he not taken Phil at his word and believed the other to have water which he was trying to keep for himself. What a cur he had felt when Phil turned his flask upside down, and Hugh knew then that his chum had been three hours longer without water than himself.

The picture was as vivid as any thrown upon a dark curtain; and had Phil's attitude been in the least contrite when Hugh joined him, the memory of that incident might have impelled Hugh to stretch out his hand and take his chum's, promising to stand by him to the death, if he would be honest with him.

For it was not the killing of Selfridge that stood out black in Hugh's mind. It was the double-dealing. Had Phil committed a murder and rushed to Hugh for protection, Hugh would have seen only the boy he knew, not a murderer; and, even to the extent of incriminating himself, would have given the supplicant sanctuary.

But Phil's eyes were as somber as before, and his voice was harsh when he addressed Hugh.

"I've got all the gold out of the first chest. There's another one under it. Bear a hand, will you?"

Together they lifted forth the great oaken box. An idea came to Hugh.

"That'll float," he said. "We can put half a dozen of the bags in it and tow it down-stream. Try it."

The chest rested lightly on the water. They placed four burlap bags in positions that would give it equilibrium. It sank an inch below the water, and they added other bags until the entire treasure remaining was stowed away. Still the chest had a full two feet above the water-line and held a steady position. Hugh passed a light rope through one of the brass handles, tying a sailor's knot exactly in the center of the handle and hardening the knot by the application of water.

He would try Phil, would discover if it was possible for him to be the traitor he had imagined when he removed the ignition-plug of the motor-car. It would cost him only a swim to find out. Phil couldn't get the car away without that plug.

"You tow the thing down," he said, placing the lantern on top of the sacks of coin. "There's not room for two in the boat with that freight. But you've got to be careful of the current. The momentum of the chest'll be greater than that of the canoe. Maybe it would be better to ballast it a bit."

They removed several of the sacks to the canoe, and Phil climbed in without a word. There was about forty feet of thin rope in the canoe, one end of which was attached to the chest, the other in Phil's hand. He knotted his end to an iron ring set in the stern.

"Now," said Hugh, pulling the chest close to shore, "you paddle ahead, and I'll hold the chest until the line comes taut. When it does, I'll let go, and you paddle as hard as you can to keep ahead. You've only got about an eighth of a mile of swamp; and, once the chest gets into the open, you can let her float any way she wants to. The channel's pretty shallow; even if it sank, we wouldn't have much trouble. Ready?"

"Yes."

Hugh heard the dip of the paddle and felt the rope slipping through his left hand. The current strained at the chest; and it was with some difficulty that his other hand, clasped in the brass handle, held the bulky oaken frame back.

But soon, in the light of the lantern,

he saw the line lift itself out of the water until it ran parallel to the surface. He released his hold, and the light atop its precious load floated away, its speed increasing as it reached the center of the current, until it was not long before it had raced from sight.

Now, they had all the gold the motor-car would contain. Phil knew that for Hugh to leave the islet, he must strip himself of his clothes and swim. It would not be difficult for him to remove Hugh's change of apparel from the camp. It was twenty miles to the nearest railway station, so they would have the start of four or five hours.

It couldn't be planned better.

Hugh walked back and sat beside the hole in the ground. It was no longer possible to distinguish anything, but it seemed less lonesome there.

So, alone in absolute darkness, he waited. He was on the safe side, the ignition-plug in his pocket. He had nothing to fear but a cold swim through the swamp, with the disagreeable possibility of meeting some reptile in the water. But he was as filled with tearing uncertainty as though he risked all.

Would Phil do it?

And would Donna permit him?

He had a long time to think it over. The canoe might have returned and made the trip again and again, a score of times. Still he waited. He was safe, and he wanted to have the full measure of his friend's perfidy.

CHAPTER VII.

ONLY ONE MAN LEAVES THIS PLACE.

A STRANGELY warm gust of wind tossed some multicolored leaves into Donna's face as she bent over to assist Phil with the last sack of gold coins. She turned a troubled gaze to him.

"It looks like stormy weather," she said. "Hadn't you better go back and get Mr. Coates. He must be terribly lonely up there, without even a light. Please go. I've asked you a dozen times."

A curious mental telegraph exists between two people who have shared the same bed and board for many years. Hugh had suspected Phil of desiring to

do a certain thing—the very thing, in fact, which was then formulating in Phil's mind.

When he had brought down Donna with the first load of the treasure, he had told her to take the boughs down that sheltered the motor-car, so that the treasure might be stowed away. The sight of the crimson vehicle had, however, started a new train of thought in his mind.

Since he had found the revolver, no doubt existed in Phil's mind that Hugh was guilty of the crime. And he reasoned just as his friend had done—that Donna was a secondary consideration to the treasure where Hugh was concerned. Vengeance upon a friend was out of the question. He, Philip Bemis, would never be a witness against him. But to assist him in his conspiracy to marry the girl was not to be thought of.

Nor did he ever wish to look upon Hugh's face again.

Under normal circumstances, neither would have believed the other guilty of the crime; and, no matter how strong the evidence, each would have gone frankly to the other, demanded his word as to his guilt or innocence, and stood by him in either case.

But the girl was there, and the inevitable triangle separated them from one another as it brought each near to the apex—herself.

Phil was honorable enough. He knew that to tell the girl of his love while she was alone with him, to explain Hugh's guilt, and ask her to come under his own protection, would be like offering a home to a friendless child. So, now that Hugh was safely on the island, he racked his brain for some excuse by which both he and Donna could take the motor-car away, yet speak no word against Hugh.

The reason he evolved was a flimsy one, and he knew it. But it was the best he could think of, and it would have to do.

He lifted his somber eyes to Donna, but averted them as he spoke the lie.

"Hugh isn't on the islet," he said. "We've got a clue as to who committed the crime. He's following it out. He told me he wanted us to get away from here as quick as we could. To take the

motor-car and get away. He'll meet us in Philadelphia."

He rose to his feet and held out his hand.

"Get your things into the car—those you really need, of course. Leave the rest here. You won't need any of them now you're rich!"

"You mean, go away and leave Hugh—Mr. Coates?"

"Why, of course," Phil replied impatiently. "He wants us to. He's afraid the man who killed Mr. Selfridge will be down on the camp any minute with a pack of ruffians, and he doesn't want you to take chances."

"Oh, I'm not afraid," she said slowly, adding: "Not with you here, that is."

He turned eyes upon her that flamed the words he would not say. She met their gaze steadily, and patted his hands.

"I'm not afraid. You'll protect me, won't you?"

But the onlooker would have said, comparing the notes in the voices of each, that it was the boy with the blond hair that needed protection far more than this self-possessed little maiden with the wind-blown locks and the eyes that forever went back to the look of tragedy.

"Yes, of course I'll protect you," he rejoined, covering her rough little hands with his. "You know I'll protect you."

"Then we'll stay until Hugh finds out. I'm not in any hurry to go. I'm happy here—quite happy. And besides, it looks like a storm is coming up. I'd rather be in this quiet little cove than in a car where the lightning is liable to strike one. Let's cover it up again; shall we, Phil? And then try to find Hugh and bring him back here."

"No," said Phil stubbornly. "No. Hugh and I have made our arrangements. He's not coming back here. He'll meet us in Philadelphia, I tell you. I've given him an address where he can find us. What's the use of waiting? Come on, won't you, Donna?"

She shook her head.

"Not now," she said. "Wait until this storm blows over. I'm sorry Hugh's going to be out in it. Don't you think you could find him, if you

tried? Don't you remember what direction he took? I think it was very unkind of him to go without saying good-by to me."

"It wasn't a clue that would wait," returned Phil sullenly. "It had to be followed up then and there. It was important and — er — had to be followed. You understand?"

"No, I don't," was Donna's practical reply, "because you haven't told me what the clue was. I'm interested. He was my stepfather. Tell me!"

Phil turned away, his mouth forming aimless and profane words. He lacked experience in lying—did not know just how to begin when he had no mendacity ready to his tongue. The girl followed his movements with the eyes of perception.

"I don't just exactly know what is the matter with you, Mr. Bemis," she said in a curious voice.

It sounded so strange that he wheeled and looked at her, but her eyes were shaded by her lashes, and he got no information there. Her attitude brought to his mind the saying that a man must be masterful with women. The saying was right enough, but Phil had forgotten that it applied only to the women who chanced to be in love with the masterful men.

Masterfulness is well enough to hold a woman once she was in love, but no man ever won one by masterfulness unaided by personal attraction.

"Now, I don't want to quarrel with you, Donna," he said as quietly as he could; "but we're going to leave this place in just about fifteen minutes, you and I. So, if there's anything in the camp that you'd like to take along, you'd better stow it away—because we're sure going."

She made no response, but walked a little way toward the beach and sat down, looking at the sheets of white foam that rose over the sea-wall.

A few puffs of warm wind had come, presaging a storm from the south, and the wind blew across the gray moorland, bending the grasses as it riffled the waves, even the stout birches bending before it.

Here and there little spiral twists of the gale blew the fallen leaves into con-

centric circles, then whirled them high in air. The breeze was sultry and chill by turns. Offshore, a steamer's smoke trailed behind it, parallel with the roaring water. But to the sheltered cove came no breath of the rapidly approaching tempest.

Phil followed her to where she sat.

"Did you hear what I said, Donna?"

She did not *seem* to hear him. She was watching the rapid home-coming of the gulls and the geese, the former disappearing in the crannies of the rocks overhead, conveying the news of nature's fury in unmusical squawks to their broods of young ones who had not ventured forth, the larger birds sinking to shelter in the dark splotch where Hugh sat waiting beside the place that looked like a newly dug grave.

"I ask you, Donna, did you hear what I said?"

Still she pretended not to hear him, and perhaps she did not. Her eyes had the appearance of one who meditates deeply on momentous matters.

Never before had Phil appeared to such poor advantage as now, when he stood in an attitude intended to be threatening, but which, in view of the unmoved girl, was futile in the extreme, having as it did the appearance of a small boy endeavoring to bully a sister older and wiser than himself.

Perhaps he realized something of this sort, for he bent over, caught her by the shoulder, and spoke hoarsely in her ear.

"Maybe the wind's blowing too much for you to understand me. But I said we were going to leave here in fifteen minutes, and I meant it. Do you understand?"

She remained silent, and he walked over to where the motor stood, busying himself with preparing it for the start. She had not changed her position when he returned, attired in his motor-coat and carrying hers over his arm.

"Put this on," he said, his tone harsh.

She rose and regarded him distantly. Somehow, it did not seem that the dictatorial manner was a success with this girl. She no longer seemed the childish little one in need of protection.

Instead, she had the air of one infinitely able to take care of herself, and

preferring much to do so. But he had begun the treatment, and his pride, which he took for firmness, compelled him to continue it.

"The motor's all ready," he said. "And we're going. So put this on." He handed her the coat. "I'll throw the hood over, in case it rains; but it's liable to be chilly, and we've got a long way to go to get to Baltimore."

"I'm not going," she said simply. "I thought I told you that. I'm going to wait here until Hugh gets back."

"Are you in love with that scoundrel of a Hugh?" he burst out, pinioning her hands. "Are you—are you?"

Again she spoke in the curious tone she had used before, a peculiar glitter in her eyes which hardened them and robbed her face of the expression of youth.

"I had quite enough of that once," she said as she removed her hands from his grasp with an ease that astonished him. "No man is ever going to threaten, bully, or misuse me again. Don't you try it—for your own sake, don't!"

It was the tone one uses to a child. Phil's face flamed with fury, and he caught her hands again, this time holding them in a grip she could not break unless she did herself an injury. But her eyes regarded him just as steadfastly as before.

"I've warned you not to do that," she said; "and I shan't warn you again. Believe me, I shan't!"

His gesture was despairing as he released her, and his hand was very gentle when it rested on her shoulder.

"Oh, Donna," he cried, "I'm doing it for your own good—honestly I am. It isn't for myself. It's for you. Don't think of Hugh. He isn't worth thinking of."

"He was my friend, and I thought I knew him. But I didn't, I didn't. He isn't the right sort. You'll find that out. He'll make your life a hell for you. I can't tell you why, but I know, I know. Won't you believe me?"

Her face was soft again; it held something like maternal tenderness. She did not want to hurt him.

"Phil," she said, "you're an awfully nice fellow. I like you very much. But you shouldn't talk that way about

Hugh. I don't think he'd go back on you. You don't find a friend very often. He's your true friend. You ought always to think of him that way.

"And you haven't deceived me about the clue he's discovered and is going to follow up, and, afterward, is going to meet us in Philadelphia. Hugh's up in the swamp. He can't get back unless he swims. Get into the canoe and fetch him. Then we'll all start away together, if you like. Won't you?"

"I can't!" he almost shouted. "I can't! It's on account of you. Won't you take my word for it. Donna—please!"

She shook her head.

"I can't believe anything wrong about Hugh. And I won't leave him up there. Go and get him, and then say what you like."

"I will," the boy suddenly exclaimed. "I will, on one condition. That you'll promise to marry me. I love you, Donna; love you with all my heart and soul. I love you so much I've been miserable ever since I've seen you, because I was afraid you mightn't ever care for me."

"I was wrong to speak to you the way I did, and I guess it was rotten of me to knock Hugh. But—well, if you cared for him, I'd kill him rather than see him have you. Yes, I might even kill you, too."

The eyes of tragedy seemed to grow very, very old.

"You wouldn't kill anybody, Phil. You couldn't. Don't say you would. It isn't a thing to be proud of. Thank Heaven, you haven't something in your heart that burns and burns, and can only be put out with human blood. Be proud you have a nature like that—a nature that couldn't do anything that was mean and treacherous and sneaky."

"You're not yourself when you talk the way you do now. You're not yourself; and, Heaven pity me, I've made you the way you are. Let me undo the work; let me get down on my knees to you and plead never to take the life of another, no matter what reason you may have to hate. You've done something then that only the Creator can make right. You cannot atone."

"I'm sorry it's this way between Hugh

and yourself. You loved one another; you were so brave, so honest, so true. I—well, no matter— Go get Hugh, Phil, and come back. I'll forget what you've said. Be friends again, won't you?"

She was kneeling as she stretched up her hands to him. He drew her up in a sudden passionate embrace.

"Donna, you're so good, so far beyond a fellow like me. But I love you. Say, anyhow, that you don't care for any one else. Give me a chance to win you. I'll go back and get Hugh; I'll even be friends with him, if you say so.

"But, first, tell me you don't love him. Tell me you never could, never would, love him. Tell me he hasn't got a chance to win you. For, if I thought he had, by Heaven! I'd leave him in that swamp to rot till judgment day!"

"No, no—no!"

The girl screamed the words as she caught Phil and suddenly whirled him about, her nails deep in the flesh of his wrists.

"Let me go. I mean it. Let me go!"

"Yes, let her go!" said another voice.

He jerked himself free and faced a man dripping with mud and slime, his wet hair across his forehead, face scratched and bleeding, and jaw set ominously.

For the moment he did not recognize Hugh. Then his hand went into his pocket, and the revolver came out.

"It's not wet now," he said; "and it's got dry cartridges in it. Get back in the water where you belong, you rat, or I'll kill you!"

Hugh lifted a hand and brushed the hair from his eyes, which, seeming to take Phil little into consideration, wandered from the ready motor-car to the coat that Phil wore and the other that he carried over his arm.

"You might have brought me back to say good-by," he remarked casually, but his tone was that quiet, slow one that Phil had heard before, when, in Tonopah, the two of them had played against a "brace" game and Hugh, discovering it, had demanded their money back. It was an old gambler he had spoken to then; and, though there was no fear in him, he knew the sort of a

man who never drew a revolver except to shoot. The money had been returned.

Phil's finger trembled on the trigger, and he lowered the weapon.

"We're going away—Donna and I," he said, 'trying to copy Hugh's tone. "We're going away. Understand?"

"I understand. Why don't you go?"

He kept his eyes steadily on his old friend. Phil could not meet their lowering gaze. He turned to Donna.

"Get into the car," he said. "I mean it. Get into the car. That's about the only way you'll save his life. I didn't want to kill him, but he had to come back, and now he hasn't a chance unless you do what I say. Get into the car."

"Yes; get into the car, Donna," advised Hugh. "Don't you see that's the only way you'll save my life. Do what he says."

She looked at him in wonderment for a moment, then crossed and gave him her hand.

"Good-by, Hugh. I'm sorry."

"Good-by."

He turned to Phil.

"If by any chance you should want to see me in the next few minutes—before you go, of course—why, you'll find me up there on the moor. So long."

As one who is no longer interested, he climbed the declivity leading out of the cove, and made his way across the gray waste. For some time he kept up a rapid pace; then, reaching a flat stone, he sat down and surveyed the angry, rolling sea and the black masses of clouds that were piling up overhead.

The wind had begun a persistent howling; the surf was booming in his ears. A sailing-ship showed stark spars as it was tossed high, then sank until only the tip of its mainmast could be seen from shore.

The uproar was such that he did not hear Phil, even when the latter shouted at him. But he looked up as the wind brought a whiff of gasoline to his nostrils and saw his friend standing there, face white, fingers twitching.

"I thought maybe you'd want to see me again before you went. I thought you couldn't go like that. Now that you're here, what do you want?"

"You know what I want," was Phil's response as he stepped back, holding the leveled revolver close to his waistline. "Come across with it."

"I see," said Hugh suavely. "I'm to give you the means of running off with the treasure and the girl, am I? Well, now, where do I come in? You don't seem to have figured on me wanting anything. That's inconsiderate. Where do I come in?"

"There's as much treasure left as we've taken," answered Phil. "That's yours. It's not my business how you get it away. Hide it somewhere else, and come back and dig it up again. I sha'n't bother you. But give me that ignition-plug, and be quick about it, or you won't do any bothering about treasure or anything else."

Hugh pointed to the flat stone.

"See that? Well, put your revolver there. I'll put the plug beside it. Then we'll have a talk. This world isn't big enough for both of us. One's going to go across. That'll be the one that wins. We're pretty evenly matched. Agreed?"

"Suits me! Ready?"

Both crossed to the stone; both made a long arm and placed something there; both moved away. Phil tossed off his motor-coat. Hugh watched him intently.

"Now, I've got a lot to say to you. You listen to me, and then I'll listen to you. I want the truth, you understand, even if I have to choke it out with my hands. You needn't be afraid of telling me, because only one of us is going to leave this place."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIGHT ON THE CLIFF.

THEY were two men alone with a wind-swept sky and a stormy sea, a part of nature in its turbulent mood.

They stood close to one another, almost shouting, for the roar of the surf and the howl of the wind gave the normal tone but little chance to be heard.

"I want you to understand my position, Phil. You've been my friend—a good friend—a stanch friend. No matter what happened, I'd 'a' swore that you'd been there waiting to do the right thing.

"I've heard a lot about money-lust, but I didn't think you were the kind to fall for it. But you have. You're all the things a man oughtn't to be.

"Understand, I'm on to you. You might as well make a clean breast of it before we find out which is the better man. But even now I'm willing to give you a chance. Stay here in this place, and let me take Donna away. That's my last word."

"That all you got to say?"

"That's all."

"All right, then; now, you listen to me."

He paused, gathering breath, for the long sheets of pale-green water were bursting over the sea-wall into mountains of foam and with the crash of heavy artillery.

"You say you're on to me. Well, if you're talking about my leaving you on the island, all right. It might have been a shine trick if you'd been on the square with me—but you weren't. I found your revolver in that treasure-chest.

"Heaven knows you must 'a' been crazy to have left it there. But I found it, all right. Now, some people would have run straight to somebody else and told 'em about it. But I didn't. And I haven't yet. Donna doesn't know you killed Selfridge, and I didn't have any idea of telling her.

"I just handed back your gun to you to let you know I was on. That looks like a pretty good friend, doesn't it? And I was going to leave you here with the rest of the coin, wasn't I? Do you think I would have split to the police about it? Not me. I've been on the level with you, Hugh Coates, and I don't want you to fight until you know I've been—too."

Hugh stared at him, seemingly trying to read his mind; then he threw back his head and laughed more harshly than the sea-birds screamed—laughed long and laughed loud.

"I'd thought that's what you had planned out in your mind," he said presently, an evil sneer on his face. "I about sized you and your scheme up. You pup!"

"Scheme—what d'you mean? You won't have the face to say you didn't kill Selfridge. Why, I've got it on you!

I found your revolver there on the islet. You didn't sleep in your bed last night. Why, you—"

"Lord—what an actor you are!"

Hugh stepped back and viewed him, aghast. Was it possible to have lived with a man all the years that he had lived with Hugh to find him, in one illuminating instant, the greatest scoundrel in the world?

"Actor! What are you talking about? You don't dare to say you didn't kill Selfridge. I tell you, I've got it on you, ten ways from the jack. I thought you were going to be on the square—"

Hugh's laugh was more like a growl now.

"Do you think you've fooled me for a minute?"

He advanced toward Phil with clenched fists.

"Let me tell you something. From the minute you handed me that gun, I knew what you were going to do. I can see what you did last night as plainly as if I did it myself."

"Ha—that's good! Guess you can."

Phil's angry, sneering face was close to his. Hugh caught him by the chin and held his head in that position.

"I don't think you started out with that intention. But when you saw my gun where it was, you thought that would stand for your acquittal. Oh, I see you! And now let me tell you something else. Selfridge wasn't killed on the islet. He was killed right down here by the camp-fire.

"He came back with the necklace in his pocket, and he was showing it to you, or I guess he was holding it up to the fire when you hit him across the head with the canoe paddle. I noticed the paddle when I came back the last time—the time I took this ignition-plug. There were two canoe paddles. He used the one with the blue streak when he went away last night, and that's that paddle that lies under the motor-car right now, while the red one is the one that floated down with the canoe. You see, you forgot that, Phil Bemis."

"So that's how it was done," breathed Phil. "That's how it was done!"

"Then you saw he was dead, and you lost your nerve. You wanted it to look as if somebody else had done it. So you

carted his body into the canoe and rowed him up to the island and left the lantern and my revolver there. Then you came back and left the canoe in the bushes. Are you going to confess?"

"Confess? When you've just told me how you did it? Are you insane? Come; I won't kill you. I see how it is. You've gone mad. Mad! Good-by!"

Phil sprang toward the stone where the revolver lay, but Hugh was on his back before he had taken two steps.

"So you can't even be square at the last deal. Well, it's your finish. I've got the back-hold, and you needn't yell for mercy when I get you down."

His fingers gripped Phil's neck. Phil, gurgling, fell back on him, his right hand groping for a sheath-knife in his pocket. Hugh knew the pocket and knew the knife, a present to Phil on his birthday, and—the sardonic humor of it—from him!

He loosed a hand about Phil's neck and, reaching down, caught the groping fingers which had found the weapon. Phil's other hand had caught Hugh's throat now, and Hugh with a beast-like howl forced the hand holding the knife back, and farther back, until the fingers loosened their hold on it and it fell to the ground. But in the same moment the fist doubled and the arm flew forward, breaking its skin against Hugh's teeth.

Then, with blood upon them, they rolled to the ground, fighting and clawing like two panthers.

Each man had released the other's throat, but Hugh's arms were locked about Phil's neck in an endeavor to force back Phil's head until the slender column that supported it should break and the head fall helplessly to the sands.

Phil, in desperation, gripped Hugh about his middle and dragged him up again, lifting him in air and bringing him down hard upon his feet, the old trick that has broken many a man's back.

But in this effort Phil left the upper part of his body wholly unguarded; and Hugh, crooking one arm about the back of his neck, reached down and pinioned Phil's left wrist; then, using his opponent's body as a lever, he drew Phil's head down to his chest.

Now they stood, almost motionless,

the sweat running from their bodies, Phil's eyes staring into death. Their muscles were strained to the breaking-point.

But no mortal man could hold out under the pressure; with a groan of agony, Phil's grasp weakened and his body grew limp. He fell forward, with Hugh under him.

Swiftly Hugh reversed the positions; then, springing up, he snatched the revolver from the stone, and, in his blind fury of hate, leveled it on the man who was now on hands and knees, striving pitifully for the strength to rise.

"You've got a minute to live in," grated Hugh. "One minute. Got any prayers to make?"

Phil turned to him a face gray with pain, but barren of a request for mercy. With a long breath, he drew himself to his feet and tottered a few steps forward.

"You murderer, you thief, you traitor!" Hugh shrieked above the storm, trying to steel himself for the deed he had sworn to do. "Do you deserve to live? No! And I'm not going to let you live! Your minute's up!"

His finger trembled on the trigger as he tried to force himself to shoot. But his will was no longer his own.

Mad with rage, he shook the weapon at the man before him.

"You think I won't shoot. But I will—I say I will."

"Hugh—Hugh!" came a voice from afar.

He turned his eyes, and saw Donna running fleetly toward them.

"Don't—don't—don't—shoot!" she gasped as she stumbled close to him and fell on her knees. "Don't, Hugh, don't! For Heaven's sake, don't!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE MURDER CONFESSED.

THE revolver fell from Hugh's shaking fingers, and he stared dazedly from the white face of the girl to the gray lips of Phil, which mouthed inarticulate words. He had fallen to his knees again, and was crawling toward the fallen revolver.

"You love him—you love Phil?"

"Love Phil!"

Her tone was as hopeless as it was bitter.

"Oh, if I only could—if I only could! But my heart had not been trained to love, but to hate. There is no room for love in it now. Why didn't you kill me? I'm not fit to live. If you'd only killed me—if you only had!"

Hugh, gaping at her, had not seen Phil grasp the revolver that lay at his feet; but the girl had, and, reaching down, she caught the crawler's wrist, exerting a strength equal to his own and tearing the weapon from his grasp.

"Pity me!" she cried, her tragic eyes turned to the stormy sky. "Heaven pity me. For I've made you both beasts like myself. Listen! That is Heaven's answer."

A great crash of thunder drowned the words, and a sword of flame pierced the black clouds, casting a terrible light upon the dark waters. The cold rain fell upon her upturned face.

"I have done it all. But I did not mean that you should suffer. I was afraid. I thought only of shielding myself. I killed him. Yes, I killed him!"

"In pity's name," wailed Phil, "tell us which one you love, which one you are trying to shield. I take it all back. If you love Hugh, I will go away and never, never see either of you again. But tell us—tell us."

"You do not believe me? You think I am trying to shield one of you? Oh, you are blind! You cannot see the dark places because you love me. Oh, I'm bad clean through. I'm not worth either of you, even if I could love. But I can't."

"I tell you I was born with the devil in my heart. If I'd met the right man before my mother married *Him*, it would have been different. I've been a woman for the last three years—we Southrons mature early—but they didn't know it, and they treated me like a child. My father's friends had shown me something of the life a pretty woman should lead, and I wanted that life. Then, too, I loved my mother—loved her more passionately than you can understand—for, no doubt, you have had others to love you, and I had only her. She married Selfridge.

"At first, we were happy enough; but

then he found that map of the treasure, and his one idea was to get enough money to come down here and dig it up. He could have got some one to lend him the money; but he was afraid they'd rob him, and so he put my mother and me to a life of drudgery, while his pasty-faced son went to college and spent the money that I saved him by washing the dishes and making the beds.

"My mother was uncomplaining, and so I stood it. Otherwise — well, there were many paths I could have taken. Are you listening? Are you beginning to understand the kind of a girl I am? When you do, it'll be easy for you to believe that I killed him."

Their faces were stony, expressing nothing.

"Then I thought that, after all, it was only for a year; and then we would be very rich. He hadn't said anything then about keeping all the treasure for his son. It was to be equally divided between my mother and himself.

"Meanwhile, my mother wasted away before my eyes. But I was blind and didn't understand. You see, he'd calculated to a nicety just how much money it took to run the house, and he gave her just that much every week. But she wanted me to go to dancing-school and learn languages and all that, so she told me she had a little saved away and that would pay for it.

"And I believed her. But do you know what she was doing? Sitting up until four and five in the morning, making lace undergarments, and then getting up at seven to make the fires.

"You see, I thought we were going to share the money—she and I. And I pictured myself making a marriage that pleased her and giving her a little granddaughter and being respected for her sake—*her* sake!

"And all the time she was dying that college boy of his was living on the fat of the land, while she would pretend to have eaten so that I might have more.

"Then she died—from overwork and worry. The one thing in all the world that I loved.

"Oh, I hated him because he had worked her so hard; but I didn't hate him enough to kill him then, not even at her funeral—because, you see, I thought

he meant to be fair—I thought he intended to keep his word and share the treasure with her. And, besides, he had worked very hard, too, even if his son was spending money. So what she had done, he had done, too.

"But after her death, when I saw that the only reason he had killed my mother was a desire to bring his family back into their silly little position, the hate began to grow in my heart. And when I looked at Horace, and he told me that, since his father wished it, he supposed he'd have to marry me.

"I thought it was a joke at first. My mother had died working for the money. And I wasn't bad enough to marry that flabby Horace just for the money.

"I really thought it was a joke. But I found out that he meant it. Unless I married Horace, I could go into the street and find my living the best way I could.

"I gave him every chance. But he meant it. He thought nothing of me or of anybody else. I don't think he even thought of Horace. It was his petty family name — Selfridge — and Horace was the last of the Selfridges. Everything was for that.

"So, last night, when he came back from the islet and you two were asleep, I was up and waiting for him. And when I heard the canoe grate on the beach, I couldn't wait, but ran down to meet him.

"He didn't wait to get out before he stirred all the hate in me again, for he threw the paddle at my feet, and, while he still sat in the canoe, unwrapped the necklace from a piece of burlap, and sat there gloating over it while it shone red from the light of the camp-fire. And it might well be red, for it cost my mother's life.

"He said it would all be for Horace; that he would entail the estate as they do in England, so that the Selfridge name would always be kept up. And then I told him quite calmly that my mother had died to gain it, and I had slaved for her sake and that I wanted my share.

"But he laughed and said it was for the Selfridge name. Then I told him furiously: 'If you do not give me half, I will kill you!'

"He knew I meant it, too, for he reached for his revolver.

"I caught up the canoe paddle and struck him across the head, and he fell back in the canoe. Then I was afraid. I didn't think I had killed him, and I thought he might kill me; so I picked up your revolver, Hugh, as it lay by the fire, and took the blue paddle and got into the boat with the body and rowed up-stream, his head dangling over the gunwale."

She covered her face with her hands.

"Then, as we were passing a tree that swept the water, one of the branches pushed his head forward—a-ah! And I shot in fear and trembling—and that was the shot that killed him. It was not wanton, believe me. I was very much afraid."

"But how—how did you—you leave the canoe up there?" was Phil's trembling question.

"It was low tide then, and the marshland was not under water. I left the canoe and put the necklace in his hand, and threw his revolver into the river-bed. I kept Hugh's revolver under my clothes all the time afterward; and then, when the three of us were on the islet and Phil talked about finding a clue, I grew afraid and knocked the lantern over; and then shoved your revolver, Hugh, down deep amid the treasure, where Phil found it."

"But after I had done it, and I saw you two who had loved each other burning with hatred, some little part of me that was good told me what I was. But it did not triumph until just now, when Phil walked away to find you."

"Even then I said: 'I'll marry the one who wins.' But—I couldn't."

"And that's all the story—except he didn't float out to sea. I took the necklace out of his hands and pushed his body off. I—I hated him! And I'm glad he's dead! But you—"

She crossed over and picked up the ignition-plug and the revolver and walked away. They followed her dazedly. When she reached the cove, she held it up, then fitted it in place.

"This won't cause any more trouble. I'm going to take it away. And all the treasure that is in the car. The remainder is yours. Good-by! Say—say a prayer sometimes for your little Donna—the one you thought she was!"

The *chug-chug* of the motor sounded above the shriek of the storm. They

watched the car mount the declivity and disappear.

For a long time they stood motionless. The rain was falling in great sheets, but they did not feel its sting.

Out to sea the rocks showed jagged and white, for the roaring breakers leaped too high in air to touch them. A darkness as heavy as that of night had fallen, but through it they could see the great pillars of foam.

With a persistence that seemed to keep a mountain of spume always above the face of the cliff, the breakers rolled in upon the rocks, bellowing through the darkness like tortured white giants bound to the sea-wall, and rising ever to the full length of their chains.

Yet through it all the two men stood motionless, until the storm swept over their heads and the foaming, helpless waves began to calm in the waning breath of the tempest. With their falling, the tide rose, assaulting the shores with crashing shocks that vibrated the ground they stood on like minor earthquakes.

Soon they looked across a lonely sea, where the blackness was changing to gray, and from which the gentler breeze brought the tang of salt to their nostrils.

It seemed that the wind had died down altogether, and the black water had no break in it; but came in, long and strong, but gentle as the caress of a favorite dog.

Behind the cloud-banks broke the glow of smoldering fires. A streamer of red touched a wave and turned it to gold. And the two men came out of their dream.

As though not sure of their awakening, they stepped cautiously, for fear they were sleep-walking, after all. Side by side, speaking no word, they gazed about the cove.

A sense of desolation oppressed them. The wind had torn down their rough shelters of wood and bark. Their blankets and clothing lay in wet heaps; and as, with one accord, they ascended the declivity, they saw far in the distance a tiny speck that they knew for the fast disappearing motor.

"She's gone for good," muttered Hugh, "or for evil. Heaven help any other men that fall in with her."

Silent again, he came back to the cove. And now Phil was muttering:

"The treasure — we've got the other half. Well—we've got *that*. And we'll split it with old Selfridge's son. Yes, we'll do the square thing."

But neither looked at the other until the streamer of sun found its way into the cove and touched with a lurid finger the ruby necklace that the girl had thrown from her as the motor-car whizzed away.

With a sudden, wild cry, Hugh kicked it far out to sea; then, turning suddenly, he met the wistful eyes of his old-time friend.

Tears, hot and smarting, sprang to his eyes.

And, as he stretched out his hands, he saw that Phil, too, was weeping, and they were not ashamed to fall in each other's arms.

(The End.)

THE PETALUMA PRODUCT.

By Kenneth MacNichol.

SHOWING why the potted omelet was postponed, and a whole county became chicken-fed.

"THERE was a Frenchman did it once," said McAdams musingly, his remark being without relation to conversation gone before.

"Did what?" inquired Sweeny, the head capper, who often had difficulty in following the processor's train of thought.

"Canned eggs," answered McAdams in the same grave tone.

"Huh!" incredulously.

"Sure! So you could make an omelet of 'em; keep a thousand years, just like canned peaches."

"Then, why ain't it done now?" questioned Sweeny.

"Don't know how," answered the process-man. "I read all about it in a book that the ol' man has in the office. I guess the Frenchman did it all right. The book says that he was the daddy of the canning industry, an' the only Frenchy that ever canned French peas without putting in copperas to make 'em green. An' he canned eggs, so's you could make an omelet of 'em afterward, just like I said. Sure!"

"Huh!" vociferated the capper again, and then fell silent, meditating on the process-man's remarks.

The big cannery was veiled with darkness; the machinery was stilled after the day's work, and the immense process-kettles gave vent to labored grunts and groanings as the scalding, imprisoned steam combated the germs of ferment in sterilizing the last "cook."

With the exception of the night-watchman flushing out peelings at the other end of the building, only the head process-man, McAdams, and the head capper, Sweeny, remained to finish the labor of the day. Sweeny had stopped his soldering-machine half an hour before, and, having supplied the machine with new spools of gleaming wire-solder and washed the last traces of lead and acid from his hands, had come into the process-room to hold converse with McAdams while the process-man lingered to remove the last of the shining cans from the cooking-tanks.

McAdams had two interests in life—hens, and new methods of canning fruit. Other things are perhaps necessary in the complicated social arrangements of modern civilization, but the world known of McAdams lay between his chicken-ranch at Petaluma and the plant of the Associated Canneries Company in San Francisco, where for seven years, five months in each year, he had been the court of last resort in the process-room.

Sweeny, whose pets were the big soldering-machines, had no fads, but he had a lively respect for the processor. Therefore, no matter how far McAdams's thoughts might carry him afield

in pursuit of poultry and canned goods, Sweeny never allowed himself more than a negative questioning. It might be said, however, that, concerning the possibility of canned eggs, he had certain silent doubts.

It was just as well that his silence remained unbroken, for the process-man was already fostering an incipient idea; and to flout an idea is to drive spears at the heart of friendship. The next day, when McAdams came to work, besides his dinner-pail he bore in his hand a bulging paper sack, which he deposited carefully in the little closet where he kept his sirup-stained overalls and jumper.

That night, and for many nights thereafter, as soon as work was finished, the processor retired to the "kitchen," as the little laboratory was called, where the apparatus was kept that was used in the testing of sirups, examining fruit that showed a tendency to spoil, and working out the problems that presented themselves almost daily during the canning season.

"Must be workin' night-shifts," the night-watchman remarked to himself, as night after night a light glowed in the kitchen until long after an hour when it might be supposed that a man who had spent the day in directing the movements of three-ton trays of canned goods would feel the need of honorable repose. Nor did the processor's lapse from regular habits go unnoticed in the office.

"Do you suppose that McAdams can be drinking?" asked Elwell, the company's manager, of the bookkeeper.

"Never knew him to touch a drop," answered the bookkeeper, "and he has been here every season since I came."

"Well, his actions are very strange," rejoined the manager doubtfully; "looks as though he had been going the pace, and this morning I just caught the stackers in time to prevent their piling up twenty-eight cases of tomatoes that he had sent out marked peaches—that, when there hasn't been a peach in the house for a week. I think I'll have to speak to him."

This was as far as the threatened wiggling proceeded, for it happened that McAdams spoke first, giving an entirely satisfactory explanation of his preoccupation. That same night, after the

cooling-vats had received their last load of steaming cans, the processor approached the capper with an air of secrecy generally supposed to characterize the conspirator against governments.

Armed with a can-opener, and bearing a grimy can plentifully bedaubed with soot, McAdams took the wondering Sweeny by the sleeve and gently, yet insistently, led him away to the kitchen. Once inside, the processor locked the door, and, seizing the knob, shook it violently to be certain that it was fast. He placed his treasure lovingly upon the table, then pointed dramatically at the sooty can.

"Had it on the boiler five days; temperature, one hundred and two degrees; warranted to spoil anything in a can if it is spoilable—but it couldn't spoil that!"

With a very successful, although unconscious, imitation of *Macbeth* brandishing his dagger, McAdams attacked the can. At the first plunge of the can-opener there was a sound as of escaping steam. Sweeny sneezed.

"Gas," said McAdams laconically. "Germicide; fermenticide; absolutely harmless—absolutely."

Out from the opened can he rolled a dozen objects into a plate that rested on the table—soft, white globules, that resembled thin cases of rubber tissue filled with liquid.

"Eggs! Canned eggs!"

"Huh?" exclaimed the wild-eyed Sweeny. "But they're soft!"

"Sure!" answered the processor. "Treated 'em with dilute hydrochloric; makes 'em soft—so's they won't break."

Like a prestidigitator executing a feat of legerdemain, McAdams reached under the table and drew forth a tiny frying-pan.

"Will you kindly light that Bunsen lamp for me?" he said gravely.

Into the pan he put a spoonful of oil, and then, taking four of the transformed eggs, he tore the tough envelope between thumb and finger and placed the contents in the pan. Over the lighted Bunsen lamp he waved the pan, from whence presently proceeded a savory odor.

A deft movement of a spatula turned the mass, and when it had reached the desired state of consistency McAdams

inverted the pan over another plate, turning to the admiring Sweeny with a low bow.

"Omelet! Made from canned eggs that would keep a thousand years! In the history of the canning industry, two men have turned the trick; the Frenchy—and McAdams!"

"Huh!" said Sweeny, because it was the only sound he found ready on his tongue as he reached a tentative finger toward the plate.

"Take it along—take it along!" said the processor, insistently directing the capper toward the door. "Plenty more where that came from. I've got a little work to do to-night—so, good-by!"

With the last word, Sweeny found himself outside the door with the result of the processor's wizard cookery still in his hands. He tasted in hesitation.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he exclaimed a moment later. "'Tis an omelet, an' a good 'un at that. But I'm blessed if I ever see an omelet made like that before!"

In the morning McAdams, the processor, held an interview with P. B. Elwell, manager of the Associated Canneries, in the office. Something of the same scene was enacted that he had rehearsed with Sweeny the night before; but this time his eyes, sunken with gazing for many nights into various testing-vessels, blazed with the light of an inventor's enthusiasm.

"The theory is this," he explained; "you can't cook an egg to can it, or you have boiled eggs. The egg must be canned without cooking. Now, with fruit, the germs of fermentation are all on the outside; sterilize the fruit, kill the germs—and there you are! But an egg-shell is porous, and the germs get inside the egg. There is your problem—to kill those germs without boiling or spoiling the egg.

"There's only one way to do it—that's my way. I soften my egg-shells, so they won't break. I fill the cans, then put them into a retort and exhaust the air—air contains germs. The eggs have first been partly sterilized by dipping into a germicide. Now, an egg-shell contains air, but it is built to withstand the natural air-pressure and no more.

"Into my retort I introduce, at a

heavy pressure, a gas of my own invention that is germicidal and fermenticidal; it penetrates the egg-shell—drives out the air—kills the bacteria without injuring the flavor of the egg—the can is sealed in the retort without further contact with the air—gas in the can and gas in the egg—and there you are!

"It is a cold process from first to last. No bacteria; no fermentation—and the egg don't spoil!"

At this point the manager was ready with an interruption, but McAdams waved down his words with a gesturing hand.

"In considering the commercial side of my invention, let me give you a few facts. The food value of eggs is higher than that of the best meat. A dozen eggs weigh a pound and a half; a pound and a half of beefsteak costs thirty-five to forty cents. I live at Petaluma, the greatest egg center on this earth or any other earth, where most of the year eggs can be bought for fifteen cents a dozen. At that rate, a dozen canned eggs can be sold at twenty-five cents every day in the year with a big profit to the canner.

"I raise hens myself; I know the hen from beak to tail; I know what she can do. A good hen will produce one hundred and eighty eggs a year—fifteen dozen eggs. The cannery could own its own hens, but at Petaluma there are over a million hens producing eggs, and that is a very conservative estimate.

"A cannery at Petaluma could take care of the whole product six months in the year. Think what that means! Ninety million of eggs in six months; seven million five hundred thousand cans, a dozen eggs in each can; three hundred and twelve thousand five hundred cases, twenty-four cans to the case, of canned eggs!

"I tell you, the meat trust will go down and out—there's the question of supply and demand—we can raise more hens if we need 'em! Will people buy beefsteak when they can get canned eggs at twenty-five cents a dozen at the nearest corner grocery? I say, no!"

McAdams paused for breath.

"I suppose, Mr. McAdams," said the manager suavely, "that you have some definite purpose in telling me these things?"

"Sure!" said the astonished inventor. "I want five thousand dollars to start an egg cannery at Petaluma, you to take a half interest, and a half interest to come to me as legitimate reward for the invention."

"Just so," continued the manager. "Now, while I am not so sanguine as yourself in regard to the venture, which is but natural, yet you seem to have something very good, and I have been much interested in what you have told me. I must have time, however, to confer with my associates. If you could leave a can or two with me which you have already prepared—"

His enthusiasm slightly abated, McAdams groped in his bulging pockets, and presently extricated two more of the grimy cans, smaller than the others.

"These are some of the first," he said, "with only a half-dozen apiece in 'em; but they're just the same as the one you saw."

"Very well," said Mr. Elwell, "and if you will call on me to-morrow evening, I may say that I hope to give you a favorable answer. In the meantime, I think that the process-room needs your attention; we can't spare you there for the present, you know. To-morrow evening—don't forget."

Smilingly the manager bowed McAdams to the door, and not until the processor had retreated to his own domain did he think how easily he had been dismissed.

"These business men are a smooth outfit," he mused, scratching his auburn pate. "But he said that he hoped the answer would assuredly be favorable to me."

The answer was favorable, and within forty-eight hours McAdams, hen fancier, processor, and inventor of canned eggs, found himself the prime stockholder in the Petaluma Canning and Packing Company, a corporation to be capitalized at two hundred thousand dollars, and destined to exploit, in a new way, the world-wide renowned Petaluma product.

Also, McAdams's temperate opinion in regard to the merits of his own invention was raised to a point that threatened to sterilize the blood corpuscles in his body. One might have thought

that even his hair flamed a more fiery aureole about his brow.

II.

THE newly elected directors of the Petaluma Canning and Packing Company were holding their first conference session in the company's recently acquired offices in San Francisco. At the head of the long table sat Mr. P. B. Elwell, president and general manager of the new company, suave, formal, courteous, the man of business, *sans reproche*.

At the foot of the table sat Mr. John McAdams, the principal stockholder, complacent over his elevation to high places, yet somewhat uneasy because of the unwonted armor of starched linen in which he was incased. Around the table were ranged the other directors, these for the larger number being stockholders in the Associated Canneries Company.

Mr. Elwell addressed Mr. McAdams:

"You understand, Mr. McAdams, that while the company is non-productive, I, as one of the directors, would not feel that we were doing justice to the stockholders should we offer you an exorbitant salary for your services as superintendent. I should say that about four hundred dollars per month, increased to five hundred when the plant is in operation, should be a figure satisfactory to all parties."

"Sure!" said McAdams imperturbably, after he had restrained a gasp of amazement by grasping hard at the arms of his chair. "That suits me all right. But I would like to have Sweeny in on it."

"As superintendent, Mr. McAdams, you will be at liberty to employ such help as seems necessary, paying reasonable salaries to your assistants. I think it would be well for you to go at once to Petaluma, to oversee the building now being done."

"It should not be over a month at the latest before we install the machinery. Then there are the contracts with the chicken-ranchers, and so forth. But I think that we need not worry the directors with those."

"You can draw on the treasurer for

such money as you need, all accounts to be subject to the approval of the directors at each quarterly meeting. I think that is all, gentlemen?"

"Move we adjourn," yawned a heavy man with a broad expanse of shirt-front, who had been nodding sleepily in his chair.

The motion was carried, and, after shaking hands with each of the other directors, John McAdams, lately invested with a title in plutocracy, took his way to the elevator of the big office-building.

The next day he boarded the train for Petaluma, and, as a commentary on man as he is, the first thing McAdams did upon his arrival was to smash with an ax the neat chicken-brooders that he had carefully constructed from store-boxes not six months previously.

"No more chicken-raising for McAdams! Although," he assured himself, "I'll buy a few pairs of fancy thoroughbreds as soon as I can get a place where I can take care of them."

For be it known that McAdams was a bachelor, and his home generally characteristic of a bachelor's housekeeping.

The construction of the new cannery was hurried forward with all possible despatch, nor did this latest packet launched on the deep waters of commercialism lack for heavy winds of free advertising to speed it on its way.

McAdams was somewhat opposed to this form of notoriety when it became impossible for him to purchase a Sunday paper without seeing his own picture staring out at him, captioned forth as the veracious representation of the face of McAdams, the inventor of canned eggs. It might be said that McAdams was not handsome; but to his objections Elwell had one unanswerable reply:

"We have an absolutely new product to get upon the market, and the more free space we get now, the less we will have to buy presently for advertising."

McAdams forswore his colored Sunday supplements, and gave his entire attention to the building, and thereafter the reporters who scented a good story at Petaluma were perforce content to slake their curiosity in looking at the great glass cases where the cans were to be sealed.

Mr. McAdams refused to talk for publication, and he refused to be made the victim of a snap-shot.

At last the plant was complete. Wagon after wagon laden with eggs rolled up to the platform and were discharged of their fragile burden. Smoke belched from the great chimney for the first time. Gas machines began to purr—cans to rattle—soldering-irons to smoke.

Fifty girls stowed away the softened eggs into cans that were trucked away to the glass cases, where Sweeny, master of a new trade, sealed them under pressure; "gas in the can, and gas in the egg—and there you are!"

The success of the experiment could not be doubted; there were the eggs—there were the cans—there were the canned eggs, ready to be served in omelets, boiled, fried, poached, burned, frizzled, or baked, for the breakfast of the world.

McAdams was jubilant and content; Elwell hurried away to Chicago to contract with the jobbers for the disposal of the new product.

One week—two weeks—a month passed. The business grew commonplace. A new industry had been born; it was a healthy child, and flourished exceedingly. Long since, wonder had departed from the minds of the Petaluma chicken-ranchers contemplating this new imposition on the patient hen, and they hauled their eggs to the cannery with as little curiosity as an orchardist might display in disposing of his product in the same way.

Each morning in the cannery five thousand cans, a dozen eggs in each can, were trucked away to one of the two warehouses; the pack of the previous day.

It has been said that McAdams was jubilant; in the excess of his intemperate joy he forgot a single fact in natural history, to wit, the neurotic temperament of the mother of the egg, who imparts her capricious nature to her offspring—a nature indeed difficult to pacify. Came a morning when McAdams surprised a stacker from the warehouse, bearing on a shovel to the outer air a bursted can which exhaled an unmistakable odor.

"Leak?" inquired McAdams, without interest, for leaks and swells are a loss

definitely counted upon in all canning operations.

"Well, if it is," the stacker answered, "I couldn't find it. An' this makes about a dozen that I've carried out in the last few days, but I couldn't find a leak in the lot."

McAdams hurried to the warehouse, where he remained the entire morning, tapping an after can with a bit of heavy wire and listening eagerly to the sound that they gave forth.

Altogether he found perhaps two dozen cans that showed signs of "venting." He conferred with Sweeny.

"Only one thing to do," they agreed. Operations for the day were suspended, and the second warehouse was fitted with coils of steam-pipe that maintained the building at a uniform temperature of one hundred and two degrees. By employing outside help, McAdams managed to move the entire pack into the larger warehouse within two days.

"If they are going to spoil," he considered, "they might as well do it quick before any of them are sold; and if just a few more spoil, we can get at 'em, the way they are now. In the other house a full half might have gone bad in the middle of the pile without any one knowing a thing about it. I guess that is a good move."

His precaution, however, was needless, for very few cans were afterward found that had fermented, and business continued as before.

The heated warehouse began to be well filled with the constant additions to the pack, and from Chicago came favorable reports from Mr. Elwell concerning new contracts for future deliveries of canned eggs. At night McAdams would sit down with a pencil and paper, figuring the profits of each day's work, getting results—on paper—that satisfied even his most sanguine expectations. He was not counting his chickens before they were hatched, exactly, but—

Oh, hopes that perish, and dreams that go astray! But a short three weeks elapsed until McAdams was again beset with difficulties, ushered in by a jobber from San Francisco who expressed a desire to see some of the canned eggs in contemplation of sales to be made to his patrons.

The jobber accompanied McAdams to the warehouse, and McAdams proudly pointed out to him the results of accomplished labor—a few hundred odd cans over three hundred thousand of canned eggs.

McAdams opened a can—one of the cans that had been moved three weeks before from the other warehouse.

From the can came an odor; he looked—and looked again.

Wildly he attacked another can—again he looked. The can dropped from his palsied hand.

The jobber stared wide-eyed, for a moment only, and then fled. Shortly after, he leaned limply against the bar of the nearest thirst-emporium.

"Three fingers in a wash-tub," he gasped to the amazed barkeeper; "and let it be something strong. I—I've had a shock!"

McAdams delayed but a moment only after the departure of the jobber. He opened one more can, but his hand trembled, and the contents were spilled on the floor.

He looked at the litter—perhaps it would be more veracious to say he stared, for something moved among the mess of softened shells. And that something—cheeped!

In Chicago the astonished Elwell received a telegram. It read:

Sell no more eggs and cancel contracts. There are none to sell.

McADAMS.

Elwell hurried to Petaluma.

With an emotion that approached a doubt of his own sanity, he came to the cannery that he had seen completed so short a time before. A force of carpenters were busy on the wide porch, constructing boxes that no reach of the imagination could construe into packing cases for canned eggs.

Truck-load after truck-load of empty cans were being wheeled down a gangway from the warehouse and dumped on a mountainous heap of useless tinware. Smoke still belched from the chimney, but there was no sound of machinery.

In strange contrast to the apparent ruin, McAdams met him at the door with a smiling face.

"Well, you got back?"

"Yes, I have returned; but what does this mean? Is this a cannery, or is it an incubator, or is it a hospital for sick eggs? This is information that I should like to obtain."

With a moving finger McAdams beckoned him away to the warehouse. There, piled row on row to the ceiling, with scarcely room for passage between, were stacked the boxes made by the carpenters outside; row on row of chicken-brooders, filled with their rightful tenants.

Ranged by a long bench worked forty men, opening cans; from the cans they extracted—the natural descendants of the egg! McAdams waved his hand abroad. "The whole building is like this," he said.

"I—I think—that I will lie down—if the office is clear," groaned Elwell, and he instantly suited the action to the word.

McAdams sympathetically followed the manager to the office, remembering his own emotions when first he had cognizance of the miracle.

"Can I get you a glass of water, Mr. Elwell?" he asked.

"Water!" groaned Elwell. "What good is water when I'm totally and irretrievably ruined?"

"Guess again, and guess better," rejoined McAdams, tapping the desk with a long forefinger. "Those little chickens, Mr. Elwell, are at present worth seventy-five cents a dozen in the open market; more, later. There are now one hundred and fifty thousand dozen, and others coming. That is not ruin, quite, that I can see!"

Mr. Elwell began to recover.

A few months later the second and last session of the directors of the Petaluma Canning and Packing Company convened in the San Francisco offices. In this manner the treasurer summed up his report:

Total disbursements from original capital of the company for construction of plant, etc., operating expenses, etc.; secured by sale of company stock; all accounts receipted by check, \$194,082.06.

Total receipts of company from sale

of plant to Petaluma Poultry Company; sale of 162,146 dozen of small chicks and broilers at an average price of \$1.14 per dozen; sale of other accessories; payment cash or negotiable paper, \$281,583.80.

Balance to be divided among stockholders, \$87,501.74.

But, notwithstanding this more than favorable report—indisputable proof of profits safely in hand—the Petaluma Canning and Packing Company was immediately dissolved by the unanimous consent of the directors. The reason was tersely expressed by Mr. Elwell at a little dinner he gave that evening—a wake in honor of the defunct corporation.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I have taken part in movements of frenzied finance before; I have also been in a railroad wreck. But on neither occasion have I been so near to total financial and bodily annihilation as I was on the morning that I saw chickens produced as a by-product of canned eggs!"

McAdams alone, of all the assembled directors, had a reasonable explanation to offer.

"A dog is a man," said he, "an' you can argue with a dog; a horse is a man, an' you can argue with a horse. But a hen is a woman, an' she'll have her own way in spite of all you can do. Eggs are supposed to be either hatched or eaten. They are not supposed to be canned, an' so they just naturally hatched. An' then, besides, Petaluma was just naturally intended as a place to raise poultry, an' I honestly believe that you'd get hens there by spontaneous generation, even if you killed every chicken in the place."

This explanation he offered to Sweeney later.

"Huh!" said Sweeney. "Mebbe you're right; but I think it was the gas. I'll bet a dozen eggs, without any reservation, that the Frenchman didn't use patent gas."

"Perhaps," said McAdams slowly, "he never did can eggs at all."

And McAdams is still wondering what that mysterious Frenchman would have done had he found himself confronted with the Petaluma product.

MY LADY OF WINDMILLS.

By Edward Marshall.

OF a female Don Quixote who spent most of her time doing mountain-climbing on molehills.

VERY lovely she was, as she looked at him, although clearly her age was nearly equal to his own. She made him think of one of those old Flemish silver statuettes of court ladies which the careful searcher may still find and buy in Antwerp. She smiled when he mentioned this.

Emerging from his arms, a moment later, she gazed at him fondly, beaming, as even elderly affection may at its true love, and breathless. Her first words were not, however, just what he had listened for.

"At our age, too!" she said.

"Why not?" he asked. Then he saw something in her face which filled him with mild apprehension.

"Marcella," he said softly, "don't begin to worry about other people!"

How well he knew her gentle failing! He looked into her face with eyes ashine with love, vital, despite the little shadows which approaching age had cast about them, understanding and indulgent.

"If we have waited till you're forty and I'm more, the worse fools we," said he, "and we must wait no longer."

"If any living soul should suffer through it," she said slowly, "would it not be wrong for us to think of it? High-handed youth has passed for us."

"But may we not, together, seek contentment in the autumn of our lives?" he replied. "Who, possibly, could suffer through it?"

Then he spoke foolishly, intending to play lightly with a vague jealousy which once had troubled him a little, but now, since he had secured her promise, had vanished utterly.

"Are you thinking of the doctor?" he merrily inquired. In all sincerity, he believed that, under the circumstances, the remark was mildly humorous.

Instantly he regretted the remark, and wondered at his great unwisdom in suggesting difficulties to her.

She caught her breath, as if he fumbled at a door she feared somewhat.

"How could the doctor suffer?" she demanded, but with no note of confidence. Then, more surely—and this pleased him: "And I am very thankful. If he—we have been such friends for years that—oh, I could not bear to give him pain!"

She paused, and gazed, unseeing, into the grate's dull glow. There was chill in the spring air.

"But he has never spoken," she went on. "I have sometimes feared he would, but he has not. I don't know—if he did care—I think that I should hesitate. We could be very happy, you and I, with friendship. Have we not been? If it would take unhappiness to any one, would we have the right to ask of life the greater joy for the few years that are left to us?"

He laughed a little at this repetition of her question, but uneasily.

"It won't take unhappiness to any one," he said in a tone which he was hopeful might undo the mischief he had done by bringing up the subject; "and of course we have the right."

Her attitude frightened him a little. It was unusual for a woman who had just acknowledged love and plighted troth, even if she were Marcella. Had he, joking, raised a bogey which had really frightened her? He knew her deep capacity for sweet concern for others.

"If he had cared, he would have spoken," he said weakly in an effort to dispel the phantom he had materialized from the vague vapor of her characteristic questionings.

She nodded, but half-heartedly. It was as if she tried to force conviction of this logic on her mind.

He reviled himself. Why had he not been satisfied with the rich goods provided by the gods and not—

"And there is Bernard, too," said she, plainly now a search for difficulties. "What will your son say?"

Now he laughed heartily. That spectral obstacle he could dispel. He was at ease again.

"My Lady of Windmills!" he said mockingly. "Rushing full tilt, as always, at fantom adversaries! Bernard is just eleven!"

She had smiled—with some abstraction, but still smiled—when he had called her My Lady of Windmills. It was a little joke between them. She knew, herself, that she was prone to see the enemy where foeman there was none, but when he spoke so lightly of his son's importance, she grew grave again.

"Eleven-years-old can form strong likes and dislikes!" she warned seriously.

"As if," he said quite gaily, "a son of mine could fail to fall in love with you!"

"I could not fail to love your son," said she with a rich smile for him. Then, almost appealingly, she bent toward him, as if she begged him to say pleasant things. "Do you think he will?" she pleaded.

"For his years," said he, "he has good judgment."

With eyes fixed firmly on his face, she reached, groping, for his hand, and, finding it, she patted it; but the subject did not leave her thoughts. She sat quiet, plainly considering a woful possibility.

In spite of her gray hair, in some things she was like a child. The wonder of a babe shone often from her wide-open, expectant eyes. Her mental habits were unspoiled, unhardened. She spoke with a sharp intake of the breath.

"Oh," said she, "if he should not love me! If he should be resentful! If he should not want me for his mother!"

"He will idolize you," her companion answered with a comforting finality; "and, idolizing you, will beg

you to advance the wedding date." He laughed softly. "Don't be afraid to yield to him on my account!"

She did not permit herself more than a vague smile, nor did she, in contemplation of the boy specter, entirely abandon consideration of the doctor as a fantom at their feast. She now considered both with a minute care in searching for unpleasant possibilities which he declared was dissipation.

"You look for and absorb a worry," he exclaimed, "as might a hashish-eater seek and eat his drug. It is a habit. You might tell the doctor by the phone that you have thought of marrying me, but will not, if he has objections!"

"John!" said she.

But he did not wholly silence her with ridicule; for, as he rose to go, she looked at him, half-shamed and flushing delicately at the thought of renewing mention of misgiving, and said inquiringly:

"And Bernard?"

"Again?" he asked, and laughed. "Bernard," he said more seriously, but still lightly, "gets most of his opinions from his dad; and, really, I think well of you. I reckon he'll agree with me."

"But, John," she said, "I—why, I have never even seen him! If we are to—marry—as soon as you get back from Minnesota, and if I am not to see him till then—don't you understand? His new mother will be quite a stranger to him!"

"By Jove!" said he, impressed by this. "I'll tell you what to do; while I'm away, if you can stand the noise, why don't you have him come here, so's to get acquainted with him?"

II.

BERNARD had not been a lonely little boy, really, for he was fertile of resources; but, until recently, no small lad had lived within companionable distance of his father's place out in the country, where he was much alone with servants; and, never having known his mother, or had a brother or a sister, he had been forced, sometimes, to turn to books for company.

One, which he had found but recent-

ly in the Sunday-school library, especially held his interest, for it recorded the many fascinating troubles in *Little Arthur's* life. Chief of these loomed up a stepmother, married by his father when they were traveling abroad, and superhuman in her cruelty.

Reading, he did not at first know just what stepmothers might be, but finally, considering her nationality, he placed them somewhat hazily in his mind as bloodthirsty Russian women (he made an obscure connection between stepmothers and the *steppes* of bleak Siberia, described in his geography), prone to destroy weak, innocent young boys. This opinion, like many of the lonely little chap's, had been achieved and stored away without discussion with any older person.

There came confirmation of it. Jimmy Artle's father rented a near-by tenant-house; the lads, of course, through mere propinquity, became fast friends; and Mrs. Artle was a Lithuanian, easily becoming Russian to Bernard's mind. One day Jim was plainly full of woe. Bernard asked him why.

"Mom," said Jimmy, who had not had advantages, and did not always speak correctly; "last night she whaled me."

"Ah, she is a stepmother!" was Bernard's instant comment.

"Um-huh," said Jimmy. "How did you know?"

"I guessed," said Bernard. "Does she—"

He told of *Little Arthur*, seeking parallels.

"Oh, worse'n that!" said Jimmy with a certain sort of pride.

Then he told his tale in full, in a corner of the fodder-barn, where it was shadowy and easy to work up strong emotions. It was really quite dreadful, and, some of it, quite true. Of this he showed some horrid proofs when he proudly took his shirt off and let Bernard, wide-eyed and gasping, look at dark-blue markings, saffron-edged and eloquent of recent blows. Bernard pondered much upon this shocking matter.

That night, not six hours after his father had conversed in the city, twenty miles away, as recorded at the beginning of this tale, the small boy said to him:

"It must be a nawful thing to have a stepmother! I'd hate it!"

His startled father choked upon his coffee, and almost dropped the cup.

"Why did you say that?" he gasped. He had been about to break the charming news to him.

"Because—" said Bernard, and he told the tales of Jimmy and of *Little Arthur*.

His father gazed at him in sheer astonishment.

"Here's a windmill of Marcella's," he reflected, "which is not entirely a ghost!"

He had divers reasons for the course he followed finally, and he went ahead on it, convinced that he was quite conversant with the youngster's twisted premises. In real fact, he did not sound the depths of Bernard's inaccurate deductions far enough to capture his association of stepmothers with the Czar's dominions.

He did not really attach great importance to the matter, but still decided that the way of wisdom would be to arrange things so that mother and son-elect should meet and learn to love each other ere the boy was told about the marriage. He did not break the charming news to Bernard.

Instead, that night, after the boy had gone to bed, he gave a long, laborious hour to writing a short letter. He warned himself, while poised his pen, that, while he must make things exactly clear, he must say no word which would affright Marcella. She must know about the complication, but she must not regard it as too formidable. After he had filled one sheet with explanations, he wrote, in substance, slowly:

The mere word terrifies him now, but when he comes to know you he— Perhaps you might invite him, while I am away—

Then he let the letter lie upon his desk; and, as he studied it, he smiled. He saw a chance to make the thing seem light and unimportant by teasing her about the doctor. Again he failed to take into consideration the essential fact that she lacked certain details of his masculine sense of humor; again he neglected to regard the fierceness of her

feeling of responsibility to all other members of the human race. He heedlessly added:

Now, don't make this excuse to— I know that that confounded doctor—

When he had her answer, in a day or two, during which his business had not permitted him to go to see her, he smiled again. Marcella ever had in store some new surprise. In this letter, with inconsistency quite feminine, she shifted her position.

Now that she thought the father worried about Bernard, she herself was full of confidence. She wrote quite cheerfully; and, in spite of the amusement—fond, but still amusement—which he felt as he perused her words, they took genuine relief to him. He would have been tremendously distressed if he had had to start upon his journey feeling that she was seriously disturbed.

Her threats that she would never marry him, if Bernard did not change his false opinions about stepmothers, did not worry him at all. He knew Bernard would change them as soon as he became acquainted with her.

After a sentence or two more of confident denials in regard to the doctor, she added:

I do wish, however, that you had never put the thought into my head. You know how horribly I hate to grieve folk. Why did you? Am I not a coward? I enclose a note of invitation for Bernard.

Bernard's father, on the whole, was not quite satisfied with the correspondence. His joking, surely, had miscarried; but there would be no time for explanations before he went away. On his return, if matters still were skewed, he could soon straighten them. That evening he gave the note of invitation to his son.

MY DEAR BERNARD:

I feel as if I know you very well, because your father is my close, close friend. I have been wondering if you would not come to stay with me while he is gone out West, and even for a time, after his return, if I shall have made it pleasant for you.

I am, sometimes, a little timid about staying here with just the servants. If you can come, I know that I shall feel and be much more comfortable and safe. Can you manage such a thing?

It was an effective letter. That she really needed him for strong protection in her loneliness weighed mightily with Bernard.

III.

Two mornings later she stood out in her garden. She had been setting tulip-bulbs. The spring air was very warm and pleasant. She joyed in mere existence.

No worry, for the moment, dimmed her primitive gaiety. She had thoughts only for her flowers. The postman passed Bernard's reply to her across the privet hedge.

She knew its source the moment she espied the address in the cramped and boyish script, and tore it open eagerly. Her heart quite pitapatted, for she had thought about the boy so much, first as one who might dislike her when he found that she had stolen part of his dear father's heart from him; and, second, as another object around which the tendrils of her love (lain dormant all these years, and very eager, very greedy now that they had caught the gleam of sunshine) might twine.

An English garden-hat, lawn-garlanded, guarded her fine, delicately tinted face from the insistent kisses of the youthful season's ardent sun. Her long, slender-fingered hands were in huge, wristed gauntlets.

She drew these off and dropped them to the ground. She wished to touch the youngster's letter with bare fingers. This was a real desire; and for a long minute before she tore the envelope, she stood there, pressing it between her moist, warm palms, caressing it with dainty finger-tips. Finally she read it.

It was a sturdy little letter, full of a boy's conceit at thought of being her protector; and, after she had read it, she gazed into the morning, dreaming pleasantly of depths of rich affection which she would draw on for the little chap. Her fears were, for the moment, all forgotten, discounted.

She who had so yearned for childish love would soon have for her very own the manly little author of this delightful note! Gain his affection? Each word which he had written whispered that he waited only for the opportunity to love her.

She had been asearch for phantom foes! She cheerfully admitted this, and smiled contentedly among her flowers because it was so. She saw the doctor coming down the street. What a silly bugbear, for example, she had made of nothing in believing that he even—

His rumbling, kindly voice greeted her across the hedge. Grizzled, gray, he was a brusk man, big, honest-eyed, direct, older by ten years than Bernard's father. As she turned toward him, charming Miss Prue Flanders, approaching from the opposite direction, waved her hand to her.

Returning the salutation, Miss Marcella had an opportunity, before the doctor had come through the gate and reached her side, to wonder why it was that these two, who had been friends for years, had never seen that they were exactly fitted to each other.

Why had the doctor always shown her preference, when Miss Flanders was, really, so much better suited to become his mate? Perhaps they would yet see it. Then the worryings of her beloved would cease. She did not, for an instant, doubt their reality now.

"Glad you're here, Marcella," said the doctor, having reached her side, and speaking with a voice extraordinarily soft for him. "What I have to tell, this morning, is better told among the flowers. I've been thinking that I'm getting old and have been getting lonely, almost without knowing it. I haven't realized how empty my life is. I need some one to—"

A bombshell burst within the central stronghold of her group of Spanish castles. She instantly divined, she thought, just what the doctor planned to say. Bernard's father had been right about him in the first place.

Her recent comfortable reasoning had been all false! Oh, why, at just this moment, had fate brought the doctor with this revelation to her? Why, even if he loved her, had he chosen now to

voice his love? She was so fond of him! How could she endure to give him pain? He must not, must not actually ask her! Leaving him, with his tongue poised for the next, and, she was sure, the fatal word, she fled.

He did not even guess her mental processes. Mouth slightly open, handkerchief midway between his coat-tail pocket and his brow, which he had planned to wipe, for the day warmed, he stood there, staring after her. Then, with a puzzled: "She must have thought of something!" in his mind (an explanation which he knew to be inadequate, but accepted, lacking better), he turned back through the gate, climbed into his gig and gave his horse the signal to amble on about his rounds. He chuckled.

"What I had to say will keep," he thought. "Good things will always keep. I'll get a chance to tell her in a day or two."

Just as he drove away, again appeared Miss Flanders. It was almost as if she had been waiting around the near-by corner. Dark, Southern, still vivacious, although also elderly, she had the air of youth now, and as he checked his willing horse, ran toward him, answering his greeting smiles with others as delighted. Plainly she approved of him this morning.

"Did yo' tell heh?" she inquired, and drawled the words delightfully, as do those who come from Dixie, in spite of her plain eagerness.

"I was about to," said the doctor, "when she was called away. I will, though, if you still insist."

"Of co'se Ah still insist," Miss Flanders said. "Ah just can't speak of it, mahse'f. Suppose she should be—should be haht-broken!"

"Nonsense!" said the doctor. "But, all right, I'll get another chance, or make one, within a day or two." He raised the reins again. "Good-by—my dear!"

She flushed and smiled.

"You—you ol' dahlin'!" she exclaimed.

He drove on, happy.

IV.

MISS MARCELLA passed a miserable afternoon and evening in her library,

worrying each time a footstep sounded from the street, fearing it might be the doctor's, and would pause, turn in and bring him to her, bent upon a fuller statement of his case. He did not come, however, and when it was too late for him she felt a great relief.

But when she went to bed and her mind turned to her other worry, she dreamed of Bernard shrinking from her, horrified, repelled. Later in her vision the small boy struck his father's hand from hers as they were standing up before the clergyman. At noon next day she went to meet the youngster at the railway station.

Her emotions, during the brief drive, were mixed. She longed to see the lad of whom her thoughts were full, but also feared to. Waiting at the station she felt like a conspirator planning to rob a baby of its father's love.

Then a figure in the distance made her think about the doctor, whom she had striven to keep outside her thoughts this morning. She almost turned to run, for if he saw her meet the boy, of course the situation would be clear to him, she thought, and his grief would instantly begin.

The figure, coming nearer, proved to be a stranger's, but the thought had broken through her barriers against it and she could not drive it out again. She had the miserable sense all up and down her spine that he lurked behind her everywhere; her roving eyes expected sight of him, waiting to watch her with a tragic gaze, beyond each pillar she approached on the long platform of the station.

At last the train came in, and from the few descending from the parlor-car she had no trouble in selecting Bernard. He did not look at her reproachfully, but shook hands gravely and said he hoped her health was very good indeed. She loved him at first sight and hustled him away as if she were a kidnaper.

And Bernard? In three minutes he was spellbound.

He had never seen so many and such pleasant shades of gray before, and in his mind he christened her the Gray Lady. Her eyes were gray and sparkled; her hair was gray—a young gray, if you know what that means; not so much a badge of years as—well, some folks do not grow

old, they just become mature, additionally lovable; her gown was gray; and looped about her neck was fluffy gray stuff which she did not value highly, for in hugging him she crushed it ruthlessly.

And he noted a strange thing: somehow a fellow did not feel ashamed when she was hugging him! Bernard was surprised by this. Such hugs and kisses as had come to him from ladies whom he did not know (and, poor little chap! he had known few) in times gone past, had been embarrassing things to hurry through, with furtive glances at onlookers. Hers did not steal his manhood!

He was, himself, astonished, when, as soon as she had loosed him (and he had seen the look in her gray eyes) he hugged her back again. Then observing that the gray stuff was once more being crushed, he suddenly relaxed his clasp. She, overjoyed to have found him other than an enemy and delighted beyond measure by this first demonstrative greeting, looked upon him with a mock reproach which was very near to actual disappointment and said softly:

"Is that as well as you can hug?"

He mentioned the peril of the gray stuff.

"Bother!" she remarked. "There's more of that somewhere, and there's only one of you! Hug me again."

She had no reason to complain about the hug that followed. Enjoying it with thrills of keen delight she forgot the doctor while it lasted; but, just as they had finished with it, she really saw his gig approaching slowly from the distance.

She popped Bernard into her carriage, climbed after him with much more haste than dignity, and called directions to the coachman which would take them home by the long way and save them from a meeting with the gig. Then, for the moment safe again, she turned once more to Bernard with delight.

The feeling that, in one sense, she was not quite frank because she did not instantly announce: "Child, I am to be your stepmother!" oppressed her for a time; but this passed.

How they did enjoy that drive! It seemed unnecessary for them to waste time in getting acquainted. It was as if their friendship had begun when he was born.

"Oh," she reflected, as his little paw returned a pressure from her slender, taper-fingered hand (from which the glove had been removed), "he loves me at first sight!" Within a quarter of an hour, she thought: "He will be happy when he finds I am to be his step-mother!"

His already very high opinion of her rose even higher after they had left the carriage and were standing on the lawn at the side of her big house—square, brick, and also gray—when she looked at him and said:

"I hope you're not a quiet boy."

This was her charming manner of taking the bull by its two horns. His father, it will be remembered, had warned her on this subject. Really she was not a worshiper of noise, but—

"I can be quiet," he replied.

"Don't dare to here!" she cautioned.

"I'd much rather not," he made admission.

"I'm glad," said she. "Please let me hear you yell."

He merely stood amazed.

"Can't you?" she curiously asked as if she doubted his ability.

"Of course I can," said he.

He looked at her obliquely, wondering. He knew quite well, from things which had been said to him from time to time by others, that when he really yelled so that there was any fun in it, the noise was loud enough to split a body's ears. Exactly those words had been used to him. He essayed a timid piping.

"That's not a real boy-yell," said she.

"Is it the best that you can do?" She spoke as if she had been disappointed.

"No-um," he admitted; "but your head would ache."

"Sonny," she replied (the little rascal had bewitched her), "no. My heart would ache if you were not a real, true boy!"

Well! It made him tickle—'way inside somewhere—a yearning sort of tickle. But you can't describe those things.

He yelled—yelled with a slow, shrill earnestness, beginning with his lungs packed full and ending with them so empty that they fairly ached. He neglected no small art which careful study

of the process had revealed to him, and topped off with a sort of yodel, created by the plumping of his hollowed hand against his mouth, at intervals.

His proud mind heard a Choctaw war-whoop in the sound resulting. Piercing, ear-splitting, nerve-racking, it was a masterpiece, that yell was, and he knew it. Jim never could have come within a mile of it! He looked at the gray lady, fearful that she would show some sign of great distress, but (for the thoughts that she must make him long to have her wed his father, and that she doubly wished to, now that she had met the son, were stronger in her heart than was the ringing in her ears) she only said:

"That's very good, indeed—the best I've ever heard; but this place is big and empty, and you must yell often, if you are to keep it full of boy-sound. I really must insist that you shall keep it full of boy-sound. Maybe, as you practise, you can yell yet louder and with more vim!"

He almost doubted that he heard aright, but stood there, silenced, unable to make comment.

"Won't you yell again, please?" she implored with eager voice and eyes, but timid, shrinking ears.

As he complied with this request there came a look upon his face, turned fully toward her as he yelled, which made her feel as if life had given her a gift. Oh, how utterly mistaken had she at first, and then his father, been! She did not mind the ringing in her ears. She mentally assured herself that it was pleasant. Some pains, you know—

Happy, hand in hand, they went into her house.

After dinner, through the dusk, as she sat in the dim library with him, they held hands a good deal. Elation grew in her.

Bernard went to bed at half after eight in the small room next to hers. Both opened from the ground-floor hall, just opposite the two doors of the library. She sat down before her desk to write about her undoubted triumph to Bernard's father:

I shall only need to enter heartily into all his boyish interests and sports,

and show him that I love him—which I do, already. It will be what he would designate as "Just as e-a-s-y!" Within a day or two "stepmother" will be his dearest word. Why—

A murmur from the youngster's bedroom interrupted her. Could the little chap be ill? She went to him and leaned above his bed. No. He was merely tired and talking brokenly in his sleep.

She bent close to his flushed face, as it lay upon the pillow, with a plan for softly kissing him awake. At that instant his confused articulations became clearer, and he said quite unmistakably:

"Run, Jim! Oh, run, run! A big stepmother's after yeh! Oh—oh—she'll get yeh—she'll—"

Her face was twisted into a complicated tangle of emotion signs as she gently shook him back to consciousness. He turned lazily in bed, stretched comfortably as the happy knowledge that he had merely dreamed the horror came to him, smiled at her divinely, softly, mistily, and looked into her brooding eyes confidingly.

"I had a nawful dream," he murmured to her. "Dreadful thing was chasing Jim."

She sat there at his bedside, wallowing in a soft hash of thoughts, until he went to sleep again. Returning to the library, she regarded, somewhat gloomily, the words which she had written.

She was dismayed. Still, she would not change a word upon that still ink-damp sheet—no! Finally she added, though:

But even if it should not prove to be so easy, I'm sure it can be done. Real love will win him over to our side.

Here she paused for a few moments. The youngster thus disposed of, there were other things to write about, and what she wished to say concerning one of them did not quite appear to jibe with facts. Eventually, however, she reached a point where she believed that she had found that which she desired to write, and wrote it thus:

And as for what you say about the doctor—I've thought about that, too. It

is absurd. He's very fond of me, of course, but it is more a father's fondness. He is fifteen years my senior, and—

A servant came to say that Dr. Foster had dropped in. He often did when, returning from some sick-room, he saw her library still glowing. If the door had not been locked, she would not have had the warning. He would have merely entered.

She talked to him in a sharp agony of nervousness upon indifferent topics for a few minutes. What wo! Bernard had already destroyed all her belief in easy victory with him; she actually prayed that the second statement in that hopefully conceived letter might not, also, be disproved; but, noting with distress that the doctor seemed to be ill at ease himself, she felt small hope of this.

That Bernard was in bed and sound asleep was a relief to her. She did not wish to have the doctor learn just then about his presence in her home. Should he discover it, the crisis would be instantly precipitated, she felt sure, and she had already suffered too much strain to make it possible for her to meet a crisis well. Then she comforted herself.

He could not learn of it unless she told him. He would scarcely dare to search her bedrooms. She assured herself of this with sharp self-ridicule.

As he sat, the doctor faced the back wall of the low-ceiled, dim, delightful room. She sat so that she could get what comfort she could find in brief, occasional glances through a window out into the beauty of the night. Their conversation was a fencing bout.

Suddenly he stopped short in the middle of a sentence. With staring eyes, with one hand grasping each arm of his chair, with gasps, he rigidly arose.

"What in the world?" he stammered, as if glimpsing ghosts.

She turned.

Like a white canton-flanneled statuette, abashed to immobility because he saw a stranger where he had thought she was alone, Bernard gleamed there in the doorway against the velvet blackness of the hall beyond. Bad dreams again had roused him.

The doctor—after she had gone to the

small boy, administered some comfort in the hall, more in the bedroom where no stranger's eyes could see, and come back blushing furiously into the library—exclaimed:

"So Jim Martin's son is staying here! Jim *Martin's* son!"

The trouble with the doctor was that she could never feel quite certain that she read his manner rightly. Now she strove to do so, but was baffled. There were always snorts in what the doctor said.

There were those among his younger patients who spoke of him in private as the "war-horse." Were the sounds with which he favored her to-night but efforts to make lightly merry with her, or had they some deep, inner meaning—of distress, regret, resentment?

He did not enlighten her. For a time he sat there, almost silent. Later he showed a tendency to talk of old-time happenings. Much as he had out in the garden, he spoke again of how the years were passing over them. Was this the beginning of a burst of sentiment? she asked herself and shuddered.

The situation frightened her, and, being indoors, she had nowhere to run away to. Then she had bolted from the garden to the house; but now, at night, it would not do to flee from house to garden. She was certain of his plan, saw plainly just how he was leading up to it. No defense was open to her except mere verbal battling, at which she was far from clever.

Their talk became a fight, in which he strove to force some words upon her ears, and he was much more skilled than she in the use of weapons then available. Realizing this, she resorted to the tactics of the desperate. She would not let him finish out a sentence. Twice again he definitely declared that their lives were slipping rapidly away.

Each time she, almost rudely, went to look out through a window. When, at last, he rose to go, it was in the air that that which he had come to say remained unsaid; that he was much annoyed; that she was on the verge of tears. His last words, spoken at the door, reverted to the boy, and the tone in which they rumbled out from under his mustache was assuredly intensely vicious, she reflected.

Suspecting her love for the father, he detested the small boy, she thought. His voice fairly made her tremble, and she could not break his sentence.

"So Jim Martin's son is staying here!" he said. "Jim Martin's son! Oh-ho!"

Returning to her desk, she slowly tore into small pieces the letter she had written. Then she prepared to go to bed.

The house was very quiet. She knew no other caller would appear that night, for it was nearly eleven o'clock. All the servants were in bed.

The evening had been chill, and in the grate the embers of a fire were glowing. Sometimes in such circumstances she undressed there, and, wrapped warmly, sat dreaming by the hearth an hour. This she did to-night; but, of course, they were not placid dreams she dreamed.

The burden of such poor comfort as she could find in them was that, at least, by chumming with the boy she might eventually—at some distant date—win him. What to do about the doctor, though, she was powerless to decide.

Oh, she mourned, did the Gray Lady, for the bereft old doctor! Had not all her fears been justified, and more? For the moment she achieved an almost pleasurable thrill from the reflection that Bernard's father must admit that she was right concerning him.

Was she his Lady of Windmills? She fancied not. This, however, was a boomerang, since their interests were mutual. How she sighed as she sat there by the fire!

V.

ONE of the things which she had learned about her little guest was that he loved to have a bowl of milk and plate of bread waiting in his room for a last lunch at bedtime; and so, of course, he had found them there that night. After he had learned that they would be there he had pondered on the matter; and, touched by this detailed thoughtfulness, had figured out the application of the Golden Rule to it. He had discussed this admirable guide for conduct with her during the afternoon; and so, just before his bedtime came, had called upon the cook and begged extra portions of his evening favorites from her.

Into the bowl of milk he had then

crumbled enough of the crisp bread to brim it, for he himself liked to have his bread first well soaked up before he tackled it. The two slices which remained he placed upon a plate for her, material for a second crumbling. By that day's last, fading light had he placed that bowl and plate upon the floor beside her bed to make a glad surprise for her.

He was so very fond of bread and milk at night that he was certain she would be as pleased as *Punch*. Hours before she sank down by the fire to dream, to grieve, there in the library, he had prepared this feast for her.

Until nearly midnight she sat musing by the flickering fire. Finally, finding that her thoughts were leading nowhere, but were traveling small circles, coming ever back to the physician's preference—the small boy's prejudice—she herself considered bed. Without turning on the lights within her bedroom, she stepped confidently across the thick, familiar rugs and neared her massive, four-post couch.

Bernard, in the next room, was dreaming very pleasantly when she plunged her slim, bare foot into the icy pulp which he had mixed there in the bowl; and, springing with amazing vigor out of this tiny, frigid foot-bath, landed with the other foot upon the plate of bread, from which wholly unexpected contact she recoiled so energetically and one-sidedly that at length she quite collapsed upon the floor.

Her wild shrieks roused the boy, and instantly he thought of burglars. The thought frightened him; but he knew that all men must be brave and rescue women when they are distressed; so, in his flapping night-drawers, he rushed to succor her with a baseball-bat—a gift from her—which chanced to be beside his bed.

His face was very white, his teeth were chattering, and the bat shook in his hands—for he had never started out to fight a burglar in all his life before—but he stood by her very sturdily as the light flared up, and asked almost steadily:

"Where is he?" Then he added: "I'll fix him!"

She looked at him with wild, strange eyes for just a second; and then thanked him very prettily for his offer of protec-

tion, and said hastily that nothing in the world but woman's silliness had caused her fright—for she had caught a glimpse of the real cause, and with lightning-like rapidity had figured out about what really had happened.

Not for the world would she have told him. She swore, with solemn face, that she often had such turns when getting into bed.

When, just as she was saying this, the frightened servants flocked about the door, having been wakened by her shrieks and the thudding of her capers, she waved them off without an explanation. She reflected, as she said and did these things, that nothing in her life's experience had required such frequent exhibitions of self-mastery, made such demand for lies, as did this effort to prepare the road to matrimony.

"And—and thank you so much for thinking of the bread and—I am afraid that, in my fright, I have upset the bowl!" she said to Bernard.

She still gasped at intervals.

"I shall feel quite safe, hereafter, with you near," she added hastily.

Her praise made him feel almost grown-up.

Then she grasped him in her arms and pulled him close. Her loose sleeves fell back so that she clasped him with bare arms, and he could feel her heart beat as she sat upon the bed-edge and held him.

As she pressed his yielding little body tight, instinctive mother-love welled up in her strongly, and as he answered her caresses, child-love thrilled in him, until he lay there happily, the quick breathing of his conquered terror ceasing; and yearning, deep affection for her occupying all his thoughts.

For a moment they remained thus.

"Wouldn't you like to have a mother, Bernard?" she said pleadingly.

"If only I could have," he said no less intensely.

She smiled ecstatically. In the very moment when she had thought about defeat, here victory came, through the sweet agency of this fine emotion!

Within two seconds she was looking forward in exquisite reverie to years of nurturing care for this delightful youngster. Then he said, with a small sigh:

"Having mothers must be awful splendid. I've read lots about it. It's as nice, I guess, as having step-ones is dis'greeable."

She herself sighed now. Her eyes filled slowly. There was pathos in the little chap's position in the world, she told herself.

She took him to his room and waited while he fell once more into a refreshing slumber.

VI.

IN the morning she was quite depressed when she woke up; but, lying there in bed, she argued with herself until she had concluded that, at least, her worries of the night before about the doctor had been, perhaps, unjustified.

Deep within her heart lurked contradiction of this comfortable thought; but she would not admit it to her mind. Also, she fought against consideration of Bernard's views on stepmothers. Fatuously she argued that, when first expressed, they had been but vaporings of a nightmare, and dreams always went by contraries; that, when he had voiced them for the second time when he was wide-awake, he had not thought about her, personally, in connection with his ready condemnation.

Thus, fighting for a glimpse at the bright side, she finally convinced herself that there was one.

When she swept into the small boy's bedroom to arouse him, she was full of confidence, and lo! as he awoke, her confidence became conviction; for he looked up at her, bright-eyed and smiling, all happiness, fresh affection, welcome.

Volatile, wishing to be reassured, she joyed as she sat opposite the handsome, gentle-mannered little lad at breakfast. She crunched her toast, believing that the problem Providence had given her to solve was, after all, absurdly simple.

She put the night aside with resolution. What a gay to-day they'd have—she and the small boy! What pleased him should be her pleasure; what interested him should absorb her thoughts; they would be comrades.

No, that was not expressive, quite—they would be chums. She would join

him at his games as well as share his quiet hours; so far as possible, she would transform herself into his mental twin. Love and sympathy would surely conquer him.

Alas for the Gray Lady! She did not know small boys, nor had she read the hint concealed in the great yell, first ceremony of his visit. Triumphant, this morning, she pointed to a pile of packages, fresh wrapped, from the stores.

What wealth of games was there! Checkers, chess, parchesi, and half a dozen other boards, with sundry packages of wondrous cards designed to cheat the young into welcoming with laughter gulps of sugar-coated knowledge about authors, trees, birds, animals. He looked at all these things with interest which she tried not to see was quite perfunctory; he praised them with enthusiasm which she strove to think was not politeness; but still his eyes, as she gazed at them anxiously, assuredly were lacking in that bright, glad light which she had told herself would shine in them when first their glances fell upon these treasures.

With a strangely solemn mien, made almost pitiful by forced smiles, he played a game or two with her—and then asked her to be certain not to let his presence interfere with any of her ordinary plans. She was much disappointed, but tried bravely not to show it.

She wofully admitted to herself that he was bored. This would not do, she told herself, if she would win him over. How could she interest him? A dreadful thought was growing in her mind that she must romp; but she was game.

"Yes," she said, deriding her own carefully planned schemes when the conviction had struck home to her that they were failures, "these games are good enough; but, after all, they're not real fun, are they?"

"They're very nice," he said politely.

"But don't you think," said she, "that they are just a little stupid? One has to sit so still at games of this sort."

"Perhaps they're not so full of fun as Indians," said he. "I mean, as playing massacre and scalping enemies; but, here in the city, perhaps we'd better not play Indians. I know a lively way to

scalp you, though. It almost never hurts.

"Often, when I've scalped Jim, he's told me, afterward, that he's yelled just so's to be polite; that, really, I didn't even pull. But if you should put a feather-duster handle down your back and run around outside and war-whoop, folks going by would stare, as like as not."

"I'm just a bit afraid they might," said she; "but there must be some pleasant game which wouldn't be so—so noticeable. Can't you think of any? That's one reason, don't forget, why I wished you so to come. It's so hard for women, all alone, to find amusements."

For a speculative second he looked at her and hesitated. Would the proposition which he had in mind find favor in her eyes? Finally he ventured it.

The moment he had entered her house first the opportunity for the sport had caught his eye. The ground floor was divided into even quarters by two halls, which crossed it at right angles, like the marks you make in tit-tat-to. He mentioned the fine floors of these broad, dignified old passages.

"My!" said he. "They're just like ice!"

That gave her the suggestion, as he had thought it would.

"I wonder," she said bravely (although those floors were as the apples of her eyes, and lo! many serving-maids had been driven from her house for having marred their polish), "if one could slide on them. Try it!"

It will be noted that she really wished him to be happy with her, really wished to wed his father.

He looked at her uncertainly. He knew, from more than one authority, that sliding in the house would be very much too noisy. He mentioned this to her; but, after conquering a brief second of very great relief, she derided the idea.

"Why, I should like the noise, and I am very certain it wouldn't hurt the floors," she said mendaciously.

But, as he moved to get a good, long start, the peril of the polish overcame her, and she clutched him anxiously. Very quickly, though, remembering, she whispered to him, with the air of a con-

spirator, just as Jimmy Artle always whispered when they were playing pirates and an imaginary merchant vessel appeared upon the fancied horizon:

"Take off your shoes, and slide in just your stocking-feet!"

And those floors *were* just like ice!

He begged her to participate in this amusement. She gasped; but then, remembering, she said with heart aquiver:

"You see how I have needed to have a boy about!"

He knelt down and took her shoes off, and she slid. She admitted to herself, as soon as the first terror of a tumble passed, that it was fun, for she slid nicely. What charm there was in chumming with a child!

Fears and years were falling from her, even as the hairpins from her hair. And then, upon a later trial, something other than the fears and years began to fall—and finished falling. The whole world seemed to tilt—then, bump!

Instantly the boy gave gift of good advice.

"Wink fast," said he, "and grip until your nails bite in."

"Why?" she asked pathetically, as she sat upon the ice.

"It'll help you not to holler," he replied.

"It does help," she admitted, after trying it.

Suddenly she was impelled to whirl, for a gruff voice said, behind her:

"Perhaps I'd better bring some liniment. I have some in the gig."

The doctor stood there in the open doorway, observing the performance gravely. His mouth was firmly set in a thin line, which made his bristling mustache form a thatch above his lower beard. There were strange glitters in his eyes.

Anxiously she tried, as she sat upon the floor, to find interpretation of his utterly immobile face. Finally she read reproach in it; and, for the boy, she thought she saw aversion there. He did not even look at him.

She did not stop to think that, really, she formed, in that unconventional position, a sight designed to quite monopolize attention. She did not answer him with words, but her fine face replied with surges of rich color. She made no

effort to get up. Confusion bound her limbs.

"Marcella," the doctor said to her at last—and, as he spoke, she thought she saw the lighting of his eyes change softly to a soft, rich glow, to her not less than terrifying—"I'd like to speak to you alone for a few moments."

Then there came a twinkle to his eyes which she resented, although her fears were quite too great to let her think about that much. "Shall we," he continued, "step into your library, or shall I join you on the floor?"

She shrank into a huddled heap, despairing, not even noticing the fine sarcasm of his last suggestion.

As she held nervously to Bernard's outstretched hand—the doctor did not even offer to help her to get up—the door-gong at the other end of the long hall boomed in soft, rich reverberation. She scrambled. Bernard tugged. She rose.

"In just a moment, doctor. Let me see, first, who is at the door," said she.

The doctor said he much regretted that a caller should have come to interrupt them, but he did not use those words; and stopped strangely in the midst of his remarks upon the subject when he saw who the caller was.

"You-all must be a-na-a-appin'," came in the charming, softly Southern drawl of Miss Prue Flanders as the door was opened.

And when she really entered, the doctor was no longer there, having made his exit through the garden-door.

That evening the Gray Lady and Bernard tarried in the library, a room so aptly lighted that, while its tables were quite flooded with soft radiance for reading when one wished to read, it still held charming shadows, placid and encouraging to thought.

She needed outer shadows for her thoughts that night; for through them rioted an inner glare of auto-accusation, bright, merciless, and painful. Bernard, for the time, was quite forgotten. The doctor's sad, accusing eyes, photographed upon her thoughts, peered at her continually.

What right had she? What right? Why had her pleasant friendship for

John Martin deepened into love? Why could they be satisfied no longer with it as it had been? Why did her strong, awakened soul and his cry out so irresistibly for marriage? It would break the doctor's heart! She moved uneasily among many cushions. She favored softly cushioned chairs, that evening, for perfectly good reasons. Why—

"It's very pleasant here with you," remarked the boy.

Her mind now left the doctor and twined itself around Bernard. And as she looked at him she could not quite believe she was not making headway with him.

How she longed for him! Almost she cried within her soul that she cared more to have him for her little son than she cared to be his father's wife. She wholly realized, too, that while her heart might conceivably lead her to forego her marriage to save the boy from pain, no consideration for the doctor abode in it intense enough to make her willing to deny herself the joy of a vicarious motherhood to Bernard.

"But," she reflected, "if, when I am married to his father, Bernard shrinks from me and is afraid, my heart will simply break!"

She inquired if he would much object to kisses, sometimes, when there might be apparently no especial reason for them.

"I mean, quite often," she continued; "not just when we part and meet, and things like that."

"I should hate it with most folks," he said with earnest honesty; "but you may, if you like, when we're alone."

So affectionate he was, and quite plainly much in love with her! The little episode consoled her wonderfully. Even more volatile than usual because of its prolonged disturbance, her mind, for a moment now, entirely forgot about the doctor's big, grieved eyes. She remembered them as mirroring deep grief. She gave rein to the conviction that no lad of tender years like him, Bernard, could have achieved a prejudice so strong that such love as he had plainly formed for her would be too weak to best it.

She filled her eager arms with him,

and held him tight against her breast, emotionally. He pressed his cheek into the hollow of her neck below her thrilled and happy ear.

Ah! She saw quite plainly that his prejudice could not be strong enough to nullify such love. At last she felt quite certain that all that she need do was to declare her wishes to him. Imbued with such a love for her, he would right happily hail news that she and his dear father were to join in holy matrimony.

She had conquered him! As she reached this fine conclusion, he made further comment.

"Yes," he said, "it's very nice when we're alone, like this. Mrs. Artle never kisses Jim when they're alone, he says; but she's just always at it when they're out among folks. But, then, she's a stepmother! It makes it awful for him. Don't you think so?"

It was like a dash of icy water on a sleeper's face.

She tried to bring herself to argue with him, to explain that stepmothers might differ; she tried to tell him that she wished to be his stepmother. But she deferred announcement of these glad, glad tidings once again.

She hugged him tightly. What if, learning of her perfidy, he should wish to leave her arms? She shuddered, and he asked her why.

"I think it's just because I am so fond of you," said she.

"How—how different you are from a stepmother!" he remarked, and snuggled.

After that, of course, she could not speak. A great, bewildering fear began to grow in her that she ought to give his father up.

Anxiously she put queries to herself. Was not Bernard's prejudice too strong to ever down? Had it not become a superstition?

One who reads in history, as she did of winter evenings, knows that superstitions do not die in individuals. They may die with generations; but he who once believes in ghosts will shudder at ghost stories as long as he may live, no matter how complete may be his proofs that ghosts are fictional. Was not the boy's conviction that stepmothers were vicious of this sort?

Could he ever, let come what days of happiness and love might, be purged of it? Clearly, it would shock him inexpressibly to find that she who had undoubtedly found place within his heart had crept there, like a thief at night, to rob. Would it not be wiser for her and her beloved—make no mistake about her love for Bernard's father; it was not less real because it came near sunset—to regard this, and make sacrifice to it?

Her arms tightened about the lad. How relaxed his little body was! What an attitude of trust, dependence, it had fallen into!

Why, he was asleep! She turned his face up gently with her long, soft hand without awaking him, and looked down at him. Soft hair, in little curls, clinging to a dampened forehead; sturdy eyebrows, thick, bold—she could see his father in those eyebrows; eyelids drooping calmly, peacefully, delicate, fine-veined.

How his lips had parted, revealing strong little teeth, in just the semblance of a smile! Placid brow, serene, contented, and sheltering, perhaps, sweet dreams of her not as a stepmother, but as a beloved friend! Could she deceive him? No.

With infinite care she bore him to the cushioned couch, arranging his limp limbs there comfortably. Noiselessly she closed a window so that no draft might touch him. Then she softly spread a silken coverlet over him with light, caressing touches, and moved away on tiptoe.

She was determined now. The morning of his life should not be dimmed by even the shadow of a horrible, mistaken dream! She sat down at her desk and wrote of this decision to his father, proposing that, although she could not marry him, as she had promised to, he share his boy with her. She traced slowly, and with a feeling that this was a very generous proposition, these words:

You may have him in vacations, and I will have him for the school months. There are more school advantages here in the city, even if your country home is lovely. It is with a dreadful pain that I renounce our dear, dear dreams, but

it is best for him. We, of all the world—we who love him so—must not embitter him.

And more of the same sort.

She tried to picture in her mind the look of Bernard's father when he read that letter, but she could not, at first. Then, as the vision slowly came, she stopped trying, for, even with her mind's eye, she disliked to see unpleasant sights.

She put the letter in an envelope; sealed, stamped, addressed it. Then she found a summer wrap, and gathered it about her shoulders. After that she went as far as the front gate, determined to drop the letter into the post-box.

At the gate she turned and looked back through the softly lighted window of the room which she had left. Something had disturbed the boy, and he was standing there in the dim glow, trailing his coverlet behind him as the priests of old trailed their robes.

She did not wish to have him find himself alone and be affrighted. She hurried back to him, with the unmailed letter in her hand.

VII.

DAWN found her weary from an almost sleepless night. The daylight brought cat-naps to her, as the hour for rising will to most of us. When she finally rose, Bernard had been given his breakfast by the servants and was strolling about the lawn demurely. She watched him from her window. He was far distant from the house; but more than once she saw him glance toward it apprehensively and then go farther from it, walking on tiptoe.

"Dear little chap, he is afraid of waking me," she rightly thought.

This sign of his affection almost overcame her, for her mental state was somewhat flabby. Tears welled into her eyes, and softened even their soft gray, as feathery mists will dim, but not entirely obscure, the soft Scotch sunshine's golden gleam. She looked at the letter, now lying on the table by her bed, and dolorously sighed.

"I must get it to the mail before I tear it up," she told herself.

But lunch-time came along and found it still reposing on her desk, and with the end of luncheon came the doctor. Bernard, to the hostess's relief, was out of doors again.

Almost immediately after he had entered, the doctor brought confusion to her by remarking that he had been careful to announce his coming, fearing that if he did not, he might intrude when she was on the floor, or something.

"Since that boy has been here," he said grumblingly, "I should not be surprised if I should find you turning handsprings on the roof. Jim Martin's son! O-ho!"

She was dreadfully confused.

"But I must waste no time on him," he went on briskly. "I have better things to talk about. The other day I tried to tell you, and was interrupted. That has happened twice, in fact. To-day, I really must get it off my mind. You and I, Marcella, have known each other all your life and, say, two-thirds of mine. It was three months ago that I first became quite certain of my feelings, and I ought to have explained them to you then; but—"

She was in an agony, wondering how she could once more stem the current of his declaration. Her hands twitched in her lap, and so keen was her distress at thought of letting him speak on, and force the inevitably painful explanation on her, that her lips were all a tremble. Ah, how woful it all was!

Oh, why had this beloved friend let the calm and fatherly affection which had been so dear to her, and which she had returned with a daughter's fond regard, change into more demanding love? She wished to jump up from the chair and run, but could not.

Once she had fled from him—twice she must not do it. Oh, why was this task thrust upon her? Why—

She sat and prayed. As if in answer sent from heaven direct, came the door-gong's soft, dull boom.

"Confound that bell!" remarked the doctor.

"Hasn't it the richest tone?" she cried. "Have I ever told you? It was made in India!"

He looked at her, astonished.

"Don't I know that?" he asked,

complainingly and wonderingly. "I bought it in Bombay, and brought it to you!"

She was confused.

"Why, so you did," said she, and hurried to the door, determined to be under way before the servant came to open it.

Miss Prue Flanders was again the caller, and was much astonished when her hostess threw her arms about her neck and kissed her. Such was not the usual manner of the Gray Lady.

While she lavished kisses upon Bernard, she was not at all the sort which casts them, unasked, at the lips of women friends. Miss Flanders, though, was much delighted by this fine mark of affection, and returned it with enthusiasm.

The Gray Lady was astonished as she saw what seemed to her to be quick, understanding glances pass between the doctor and Miss Flanders as she ushered her into the library. Could it be that they two were in league?

Almost immediately this suspicion was confirmed, and startlingly, by Miss Flanders's soft, rich, drawling question, worded carelessly, as everything she said was, as she found a seat and gracefully sank into it:

"Well, docteh, have yo' spoken out yo' little piece yet?"

The doctor's answer almost was explosive.

"No, I haven't!" he declared.

Merrily Miss Flanders laughed as his broad back disappeared at once, without a word of courteous farewell.

Almost always, in the past, when she had laughed like that in that house, her hostess had laughed with her, for Miss Flanders's was a most contagious gurgle, such as is born only in those native to the region southward of the vanished line; but this day the lady of the house was far too worried to find *any* laugh contagious.

"What did the doctor mean? What did you mean?" she cried.

Miss Flanders kept on laughing.

"Ah have told him," she replied at last, "that Ah would neveh tell yo', an' Ah woan't. Ah have said he must; he must!"

This revealed a brand-new phase of

character in the doctor, the Gray Lady reflected. Why should he have tried to get another to express his love for her?

Then she considered that the vagaries of bashfulness, as inspired by love, are many, and are, sometimes, inexplicable. But if the doctor had confided in Miss Flanders, should not she do so also? Thus some end of the dilemma might be reached. She began an explanation. It was difficult to do so, because Miss Flanders, from her girlhood, had been inclined to take things lightly; but the necessity for help from some one was so great that the Gray Lady overlooked this fact and went ahead. Having finished, she turned to her companion with appeal.

She found a look upon her face so different from any she had ever seen there in her life before that she was almost startled by it. Miss Flanders seemed to be disposed to swallow something very much too large to swallow, and to be choking on it. Believing this to be a sign of pending tears, the Gray Lady was alarmed.

"What *is* it, dear?" said she. She added timidly, somewhat startled by the thought which that very moment came to her for the first time: "You—you are not—have not—oh, my dear, don't say that you're in love with Bernard's father, too!"

If *that* complication had occurred, then must she just give up! She never could endure to wreck another life.

"Oh, no," Miss Flanders said at last. "Ah'm—Ah'm thinkin' of the docteh."

"Will it—will it grieve him very much?"

Miss Flanders's face was turned away.

"Ah reckon," she began, speaking a little indistinctly, "that he—he told me he had tried repeatedly to speak to yo' alone, but that you failly struggled to avoid him, an' Ah doubted him!"

"Oh, he did!" said the Gray Lady.

Miss Flanders was still, quite plainly, struggling with some great, unnamed emotion. "So—so he has neveh made a decla'tion?" she inquired.

"No," said the Gray Lady. "I have prevented that."

"Let's—let's take a walk an'—an'—an' talk it oveh," said Miss Flanders, steadying her voice.

The Gray Lady was relieved by this suggestion. Her heart was very sore indeed, at thought of all the sorrow which her love-affair had given rise to.

On the walk, however, Miss Flanders seemed to quite recover her good spirits, and encouraged her to talk. The Gray Lady told her absolutely all—more details of her fears about the doctor, first; then of her efforts to convert Bernard by chumming with him. She even told about the great slide in the hall, and about the bread and milk.

"Ah heard about the slahd," Miss Flanders said.

"Who in the world—" began the Gray Lady.

"The docteh mentioned it," Miss Flanders said. "He said yo' seemed to be uneasy-like, when yo' were sittin' on the flo'."

"If only," the Gray Lady said, "the doctor had fallen into love with you!"

"Y-e-s," said Miss Flanders. "If he only h-a-d!"

Her companion looked at her, surprised. "You don't mean—" she exclaimed, and stopped.

"Y-e-s," said Miss Flanders, apparently not abashed by her confession, but breathing perhaps a trifle harder than at ordinary times. "Ah've been in love with him fo' yeahs."

"Oh!" said the Gray Lady. "Oh, you poor, poor thing!"

"Ah don't mind a bit," Miss Flanders said.

"You don't mind!" said the Gray Lady incredulously.

"No, Ah don't," replied Miss Flanders. "Ah don't mind. Ah want him to be happy. Ah'll tell yo' what Ah think, Ma'cella: if Ah weh you, Ah wouldn't ma'y him. If yo' ah really in love with Behnahd's fatheh, why—"

"An' the doctor never, really, has asked me," said the Gray Lady.

"Y-e-s," said Miss Flanders. "That is anotheh reason. That is a *splendid* reason." Then she changed the subject. "But Behnahd is a dif'ent problem, isn't he?"

"It is so unfortunate," said the Gray Lady. "I thought that if I chummed with him—"

"Yes," said Miss Flanders, "Ah should have thought so, too."

The Gray Lady laughed a little sorrily.

"His father doesn't understand," said she. "He thinks that I imagine difficulties. You seem to realize."

"Ah think Ah do a little," said Miss Flanders. "What is it that he called yo'?"

"His—his Lady of Windmills!" said the Gray Lady, in a tone which begged for sympathy.

"How—insultin'!" said Miss Flanders. "How insultin' in the suhcumstances!"

The Gray Lady, who during her recital had been very near to tears, looked up a little comforted.

"An' so yo' have been chummin' right along with Behnahd," said Miss Flanders, encouraging further speech.

"I have been trying to."

"Wheah is he now?"

"In—in the carriage-house, I think," said the Gray Lady, her mind whirling, her heart beating very rapidly in the presence of such great unselfishness, her eyes fixed upon Miss Flanders with a new, admiring look in them. "Oh, my dear! My dear!" she said to her.

"Don't mind me," Miss Flanders answered bravely. "Let's go an' find that boy. Ah want to have a good look at a child with such detehmination. Ah haven't really noticed him befo'."

"How could you see him without noticing him?"

"He really is the one you love?" Miss Flanders said.

"Oh, I love them both—I love them both!" said the Gray Lady.

VIII.

THE carriage-house had become quickly, when he was not with his hostess, Bernard's favorite retreat about the place, for reasons which its owner had not guessed. Really, he had found it quite a treasure-place of interesting objects. Best of all its fascinating contents was a round rod of hickory, extending between two upright beams, just where a little jump would let him grip it nicely.

It had been a pitchfork handle once, and then a rack for hanging harness on; and was highly polished.

What an aid to acrobatics! The first time he observed it he jumped for it im-

mediately. If you have ever been a boy, you know what he did then, and you know how he did it. He skinned the cat, of course.

There is nothing which can give a boy more pleasure than this eccentric evolution, which is a revolution, too. And this day, the moment he had gone into the carriage-house, he had firmly grasped the bar and arranged his body in that ecstatic position which comes just as one has thrust his legs up straight; so that, if he bend them, the knees will hook across the bar, you know; or, if he curls them down and in a certain other way, they will pass through, descend, and he will land upon his feet again, after a delightful twist of both his shoulder-joints.

It is great! Bernard paused while at the trick, and hung there upside down. He laughed aloud in pure boy joy.

Then he thought he heard a call; and as he listened, waiting for a repetition of it, knew that skirted creatures were at the building's outer door. He dropped. Entered the Gray Lady and Miss Flanders.

"Oh, here you are!" said his divinity, and smiled, although the tears were very near her eyes.

"That pole," said he, in explanation of his presence there, "is great to skin the cat on."

For an instant horror showed upon her face.

"Oh!" she said, "Oh! Where is the poor, poor creature?"

Miss Flanders also made distress signs. "Did yo' skin the cat alive, yo' ho'id little boy?" said she.

"It isn't real cats," he replied, polite despite her vehemence. "It's athuletics."

"I don't know what you mean!" exclaimed the Gray Lady, relieved; "but I was sure you couldn't be so cruel as to—"

"I'll show you," he said gravely. "It's nothing you could do, you know; but it's great to hang with your head down and see the whole thing upside down; and then go through, between your legs, and see it in a frame!"

Both ladies showed signs of surprise.

"Really?" said the Gray Lady. "Do you find it interesting? But what—oh, Bernard, you will hurt yourself."

He had assumed the posture he had just referred to.

"Why, it's just as e-a-s-y!" he exclaimed. "I've never fell."

He completed the turn slowly; repeated it with speed.

It was plain that as he turned an idea seized upon Miss Flanders. At first she flushed; then, almost, she paled. Then, with that same peculiar choking manifestation which she had before exhibited during the progress of this call she gave voice to the idea.

"Yo' know," said she, in an aside to the Gray Lady, "yo' said yo' planned to enteh into *all* his spo'ts an' pastimes!"

At first her hostess did not catch her meaning quite. She had it in a moment, though, and turned upon Miss Flanders a wildly startled glance.

A vivid sparkle in Miss Flanders's eyes replied to this; and, for the first time since the visitor had come, the worried look quite vanished from the face of the Gray Lady. Instead, there grew upon it an expression gay and girlish, challenging. For the moment she was her old self again.

"Will you, if I will?" she demanded. She seemed to snatch at gaiety as if she needed it.

Miss Flanders's voice was heard in skeptic laughter. The Gray Lady turned to Bernard.

"Bernard," she said softly, "will you please go in to cook and say—"

"Don't you let heh fool yo', Beh-nahd," said Miss Flanders. "She is only—"

"If you really want to skin the cat," said Bernard gravely, "I had better stay and show you how."

The Gray Lady shook her head with smiles. It was probably the desperation of a sense of great defeat which made her ready for this reckless project.

Bernard politely stepped outside and closed the door behind him.

"Aren't we *silly*?" said the volatile Gray Lady. "But when his father comes to-morrow I must confess that I am—beaten. It relieve* me to be foolish."

"It may also kill yo' to be foolish—this way," said Miss Flanders; "an' me, too. But I neveh take a daeh. Do you daeh me?"

"Yes, I do!" said the Gray Lady.

Bernard, in the meantime, greatly puzzled because he had been sent outside, walked up and down before the carriage-house. He had taken quite a few turns on this short patrol when he was tremendously delighted to see his father coming through the gate, a full day ahead of time.

He started toward him. Then, as his father turned between the posts, the boy saw that walking with him was the doctor. His father's form at first had hidden him. Bernard was almost incensed. That doctor was always turning up at inconvenient times. Still, as he had not seen his father for a long time, he ran to greet him.

"Where is she?" asked his father, referring to the Gray Lady, after he had greeted Bernard with enthusiasm.

Bernard rather hated to explain things before the doctor—still, it was an innocent amusement she had taken up. He answered:

"Skinning the cat there in the carriage-house. Miss Flanders dared her to."

His father looked at him, aghast and unbelieving. The doctor, at the mention of Miss Flanders as her associate in this brisk sport, apparently sustained some shock.

"What?" they said in chorus, as if they had been trained.

Suddenly shrill shrieks rushed through the indicated building's tight-shut doors. Two excited female voices blended in them, and they held dismay, distress, a plea for help. Forward flew the three, with Bernard in advance.

He pushed the door wide open without ceremony; and within, upon the floor, sitting quite as she had landed when her grasp upon the pole had given way, was the Gray Lady. Leaning up against the wall was Miss Prue Flanders, very slanting, intent alternately upon the nursing of a knee and ridicule of her distressed companion.

To her the doctor hastened, anxious. Bernard's father hurried to the Gray Lady. Nor did he merely help her up. He took her in his arms and kissed her many times.

"Prue, are you injured?" said the doctor, in a voice ashake with great anxiety, while this was going on.

"Mah pride and a few otheh little things of mine ah bruised a little," said Miss Flanders, "but Ah reckon it's not se'ious."

Then the doctor, observing the proceedings of the other two, kissed her.

Bernard gazed, aghast. Miss Flanders made wild protest.

"Ahthuh! Ahthuh!" she exclaimed. "You stop! They don't know a wohd about it!"

"Martin knows," the doctor answered, indicating Bernard's father; "and if she does not, it's her own fault." He pointed to the Gray Lady. "I've been trying for some time to tell her, but she's always cut me short."

Bernard's father still supported the Gray Lady. She needed his sustaining strength, for she hung across his arms quite limp; but paid no heed to him whatever. All her attention was concentrated on the other two; and, as she gazed, her lower jaw hung loosely.

"Wha'—wha'—" was all she said.

She could not, in her then existing mental state, add the "t" required to make a word of the remark.

"Yes," said the doctor, turning a flushed face in her direction, "I have been trying to tell you. Prue, here, believed—why, she believed you were in love with *me*, and made me promise I would break the dreadful news to you myself. Between you women I've been harried near to death."

"Ah didn't think so," said Miss Flanders, who was quite as merciless with him as he had been with the Gray Lady. She took from life what enjoyment might be found in it, Miss Flanders did. "Yo' yo'sehf believed she was. Yo' said so. Yo' believed, yo' said, that that was what it was that made heh act so. Afteth that I said that it would be but the co'se of honeh fo' yo' to—"

"He believed—you thought—" stammered the Gray Lady, turning back and forth—she did not have to turn far, either—from the doctor's eyes to those of Miss Prue Flanders, fiercely blushing. "Why—why—why—"

"Well, Prue led me on!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Ah had to," said Miss Flanders. "Yo' weh so conceited! Fo' yo' to be taken down was *necessa'y*."

"You shut me up in some way," said the doctor, continuing to address the Gray Lady, "every time."

"Ah know why," Miss Flanders chuckled. "Ah know why. Ah know. She told me."

Quite a dreadful glare she had from the Gray Lady then.

"Prudence Flanders," said the latter, "if you once dare to say another word, why—why—I never dreamed!"

Soft, derisive laughter was her answer, but Miss Flanders did not tell.

Suddenly the eyes of the Gray Lady swung and caught a glimpse of Bernard. For the instant he had been forgotten. She looked at him, appalled; and, for the first time since they had enclosed her, she straightened wholly from his father's arms.

"Oh, Bernard! Bernard!" she cried quite fearfully. Would he turn away from her with scorn and loathing now that he had learned the truth?

"Better come and kiss your going-to-be mother, Bernard," said his father, showing no diplomacy whatever and paying no attention to him after that. Instead, he turned to the two ladies and remarked:

"Doc and I ran into one another near the station; and we've got a plan fixed up, if you girls agree to it. He wants to go abroad to a convention of sawbones, and our scheme is to be married—

all of us—at once, and make a wedding-trip of it.

"Bernard is at just about the age, too, when he ought to have his first big look-around. It will sort of fix a basis for his future understanding of the world. What do you think, Marcella?"

But she had no eyes or ears for him just then. They were all intent, with fearful interest, upon the boy. For a moment, listening, he had stood quite dazed. Then he went to her and put his hand out gravely.

"I am very glad," he said, and plainly meant it.

She looked at him, bewildered.

"But I'll be your stepmother," said she, anxious that he should not come to her without a clear understanding of their position.

"Oh," said Bernard, "that won't matter in the least. You'll be quite dif'rent. You're not a Russian!"

She left his father altogether and took the small boy in her arms. Later she looked at the man she was to marry, and confessed:

"I guess I am, John!"

"What?"

"Your Lady of Windmills."

He smiled at her and at his son contentedly.

"But," she added, "so long as I am yours — yours and Bernard's — it doesn't matter, does it?"

ASTER AND GOLDENROD.

By Minna Irving.

A FAIR young queen upon her throne
Looked down, in days of old,
And kneeling at her feet beheld
A knight with plumes of gold.
Her ancient palace by the sea,
Her scepter and her crown—
She left them all to follow him,
But kept her purple gown.

See, yonder where the autumn's torch
Has burned the stubble bare,
Still side by side they gaily go,
The happy vagrant pair.
She wears the royal purple yet,
And yet untarnished nod
His knightly plumes of brilliant gold—
Aster and goldenrod.

PROTECTING POLLY.

By Ethelwyn Brewer DeFoe.

HOW love's labor lost, or was in
a good way of losing, the sole
reason for its existence. ❀ ❀

FROM the very day when she had discovered that, with the aid of the kitchen-table, she could stand alone, Polly had aspired to take care of herself.

In time she not only took care of herself, but also of her father and mother, and was a contributory source of no mean value to an ever-increasing army of little nieces and nephews. Polly was cheerfully willing, and considered her responsibilities no burden.

The one thing about her that was not in perfect harmony was her name.

It should have been martial and commanding. That was probably the reason why, in the office, where no familiarity but great fellowship was shown her, they called her the Major. And like a plucky little major, indeed, she trudged forth to her task.

Weather meant nothing to her. Her eyes glistened as she came in at midnight from an assignment, with the snow clinging to her black, crisp hair, and a healthy glow on her cheek. Of course, there were times when she was weary and worn, but her enthusiasm never cooled and her indomitable spirit never flagged.

She had a temper, too. She was no Patient Griselda; she was doing as good work as any of the men, with and among them, shoulder to shoulder, and if they forgot it and tried to thrust her aside on the plea of the weaker sex, she poured forth the vials of her wrath indiscriminately upon all, from the night city editor to the office-boys. She stood her ground, gave good service, and demanded fair return.

At a very early age Polly had realized

that her native town held little for her. So she came to New York, alone but unafraid, and got a position on one of the big dailies. It was mean, soul-grinding work at first. Her consolation lay in the fact that she was called upon for strictly truthful accounts, and tenaciously she clung to them, keeping her own standards exalted and unsmirched.

Slowly but surely she rose. Her acumen was good, her discrimination certain, her sense of a story invaluable.

Soon the paper began to realize that she could be trusted. Her pen was quick and did not make trouble. In short, she had found herself. She was safely launched on the sea of journalism.

But this making of a little slip of Southern girlhood into a capable reporter on a responsible newspaper had not happened in a day; nor in a year.

Silver hairs had appeared among the dark locks. The twenties were past and the thirties were trooping along. The Major was very nearly middle-aged.

Side by side with the Major a dreamer had been working. There was no better man on the staff. None knew that he was a dreamer, not even the Major, although she was his dream.

Year after year, Robert McPherson had watched her as she came and went, laughing at the cold and snow, scolding good-naturedly at the enervating humidity of New York's merciless summers, and a deep resentment had filled his heart that it could not have been different with her. He longed to take her out of it. He hated to see her in the midst of a work that daily laid bare revolting depths of depravity.

He, even as she, had been under obligations to others whom he could not neglect. Even after they both knew that they were all in all to each other there were years of waiting; but they were good years, for now the Major's life was filled with the secret without which no woman's life is complete, and Robert was

filled with the joy of saving for the materialization of his dream home, which would shield his Polly—she had never been the Major to him—from all that was sordid and brutal.

Finally the day came when, with their duty to others discharged, they could at last enter into their own.

After the wedding-trip they went to the dream home.

It had never been a flat in the dream; so, although it awakened dread in the Major's heart, she acquiesced when he showed her a little house in a new suburb.

She had only once heard of it before. That was to interview a girl whose lover, after an evening spent with her, had jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge on his way home. The Major wondered if, after a little of this suburban calm, saturated with cheap respectability, she would not be tempted to follow his example, but the joy in her husband's eyes moved her so deeply that she put all else aside.

At first the excitement of buying furniture and arranging their belongings filled the time, and all went well. But after a few weeks everything was complete, and then the long, lonely evenings began to shut down on Polly—the woman so unused to indoors, unused to idleness or to woman's task of the needle and, over and above all, unused to being alive.

Then, too, Mammy, the old colored servant, who had been old for many years, could not cope with the work of a house; and Polly—no longer the Major, please—found her days becoming more and more filled with the drudgery of housework.

As in all newspaper homes, their mornings were their evenings. This was their time together, this when they read and walked, and in those sunny hours the little home seemed all that was cheerful to Robert. But there were often days when, tired from a late assignment of the night before, he had to sleep until it was time to go back to work; so, often, Polly began and ended her silent day alone.

The people round her were simple souls. There were women whose lives had been circumscribed. The rearing of children and ordering their little homes filled their horizon.

Polly tried fiction, and did well at it,

but the quiet of her home distracted her. It palled on her to do it all alone, though in the office she could have written hour in and hour out. Here she tired quickly.

When Robert took her in his arms and told her how great was his happiness in the thought that at last she was sheltered from the buffeting of the world, told her of his strength, his exhilaration, his lust for work, because he had before him the constant realization that at last he was doing hers as well as his own; then, indeed, she almost cried out to him. But his joy was too beautiful.

If men could only realize that women, childless or otherwise, will and must be mothers. It was the mother-instinct in Polly that kept her from letting Robert see how miserable she was in his Eldorado. She could not dash from his lips the cup for which he had thirsted so long.

Ink on her fingers she had not minded, but her whole being shrank with actual nausea from grease. And, oh! to the roving, free-born spirit, the reiteration of housework! The same things to be dusted; the same bed to be made, day in and day out, three hundred and sixty-five times a time!

The old life had been hard, but no two stories were ever quite the same, no two people of the hundreds whom she met, ever quite alike. The office may have been dingy and disorderly, but it teemed with activity and life.

In the long, silent evenings her thoughts turned to the office. To the city editor, goading her like a gadfly to catch the first edition, to the thrill of excitement as her story, page by page, was whisked off by the copy-boy, to the lull till another assignment, filled in with an argument with another mind as alert as her own, a battle fought point by point about some topic of tomorrow's news, filled with good-natured acrimony.

Or an office joke, for which no one was ever too tired, and for which time could always be found.

That was where her Robert was, where her old friends were, where her heart and life were.

The old comrades were playing the glorious game, and she, the Major-hearted, put her poor drooping head on

Polly's pathetic attempt at sewing and sobbed out her loneliness into the awful stillness of Robert's protecting home.

Polly began to grow pale and listless as the summer came on. Robert asked often and tenderly if she was doing too much. They had started a little garden in the spring.

Patiently Polly bent over the unaccustomed task until her back and head ached, and, somehow, the things didn't grow after all. When they did, she could not find any great thrill over a little green shoot, but Robert exulted, and told her how beneficial it was working in the soil.

She smiled, still too much the mother to tell the truth and ask of him the sacrifice of giving up this newly found joy of protection.

As the weather grew pleasanter, the people from the office came out oftener, and Robert was surprised to find how keen was her interest in them and their work; but he laid it to her warm-hearted concern for her old friends, and supposed much of it was tactfully assumed.

He, personally, tried to keep his work out of his home as much as he could, having read that fallacy somewhere in his early youth and keeping it by him as a beautiful but uninvestigated theory.

Soon the old friends began to notice a change. They asked McPherson if she was not well, and the dear old bat said he feared she was feeling the effect of the years of hard work before he had been able to care for her.

She was sometimes tempted to ask him if he had ever heard the story of the veteran fire-engine horse that, after receiving a reprieve, insisted upon answering all the alarms just the same. She knew how the poor old boy felt.

Once, tentatively, she asked if he found the little home and its surroundings all that he had expected them to be, and the

radiant smile with which he answered won the day for the suburb.

But finally Robert asked an old friend who was a doctor to dine with them. Ostensibly the visit was social, for Polly declared she was not at all ill.

He watched her carefully through dinner, talking on every subject under the sun except health.

"Does she need rest, doctor?" Robert asked anxiously, when they were alone.

"Rest!" the doctor snorted. "Did you ever know a greyhound to thrive at the end of a leash?"

Robert calls her the Major now. She is the editor of a magazine.

He finds that it is quite as delightful to have her as a companion, comrade, and fellow worker as it was to have her for a charge.

She was not of the species ivy—she could not cling and thrive.

But the knowledge that a strong arm to lean upon is ever ready if she has need of it, to support her or to strike for her, has given her that beautiful impudent independence that is possessed only by dependent women. She is a little arrogant in her love, a little masterful, perhaps, but Robert is one of the men who understand.

And Robert—is he any less happy?

He looks on with the tolerance of a St. Bernard who is allowing a skye-terrier to worry his bone.

His shelter is ready for her whenever she tires, his savings are accumulating for their old age. All is for her.

Her work is her joy and his indulgence—it is no longer stalked by grim necessity.

Deep in the strong, tender heart, that was brave enough to let her choose her own path, he knows that he stands between her and the world quite as surely as if he had locked her away to eat out her heart.

THE MIRACLE.

By Edwin L. Sabin

ACROSS the meadow, dead and sear,
I saw the Rain Prince gently pass;
And at his touch each withered spear
Up sprang as living grass.

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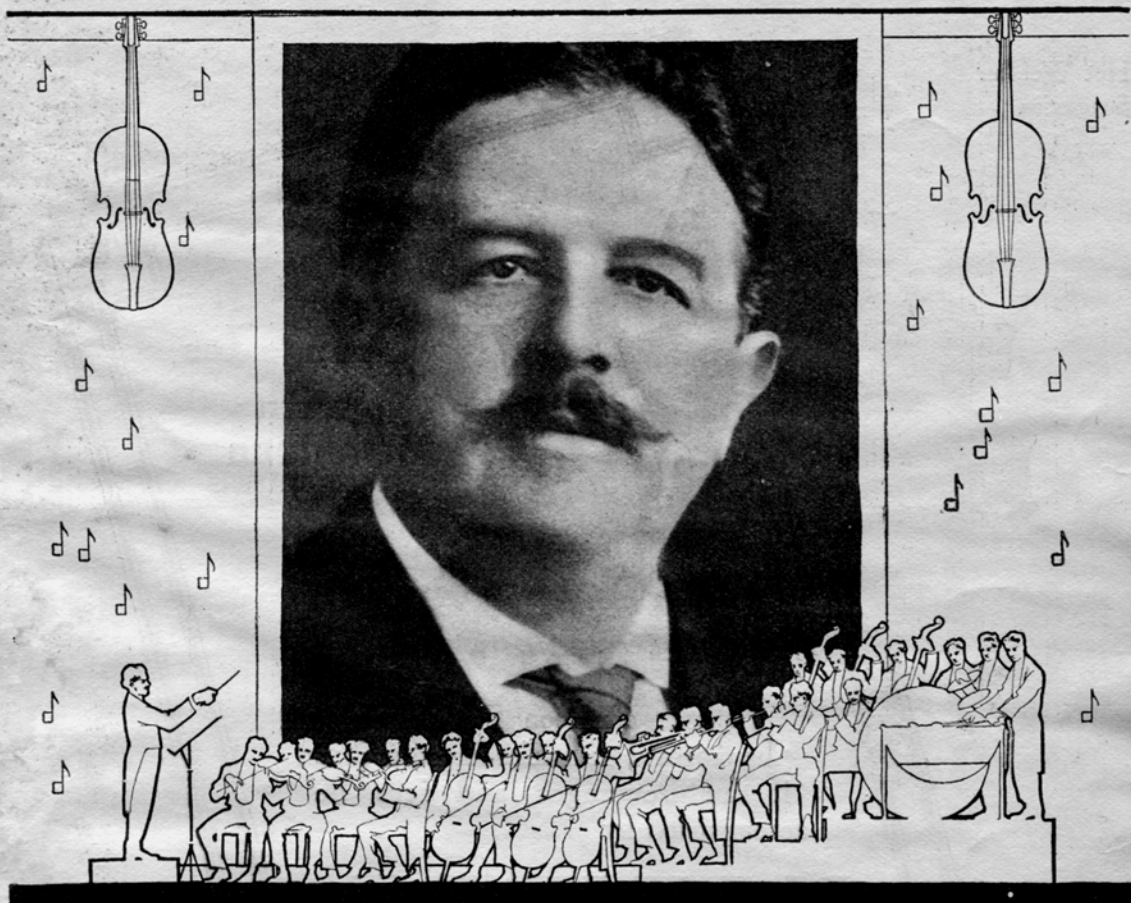
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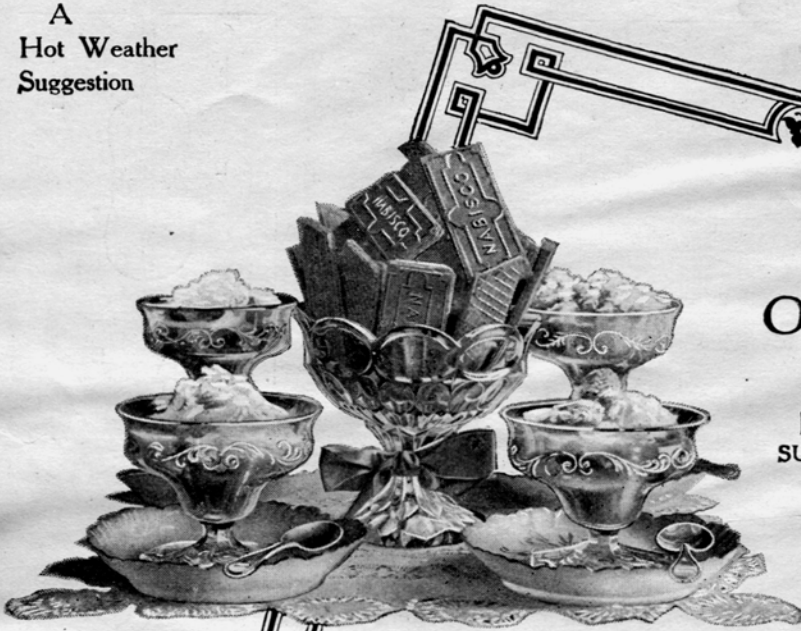
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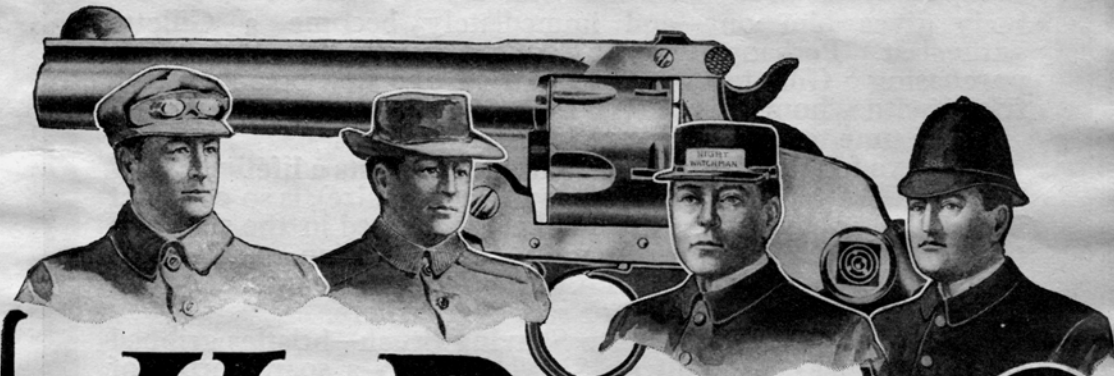
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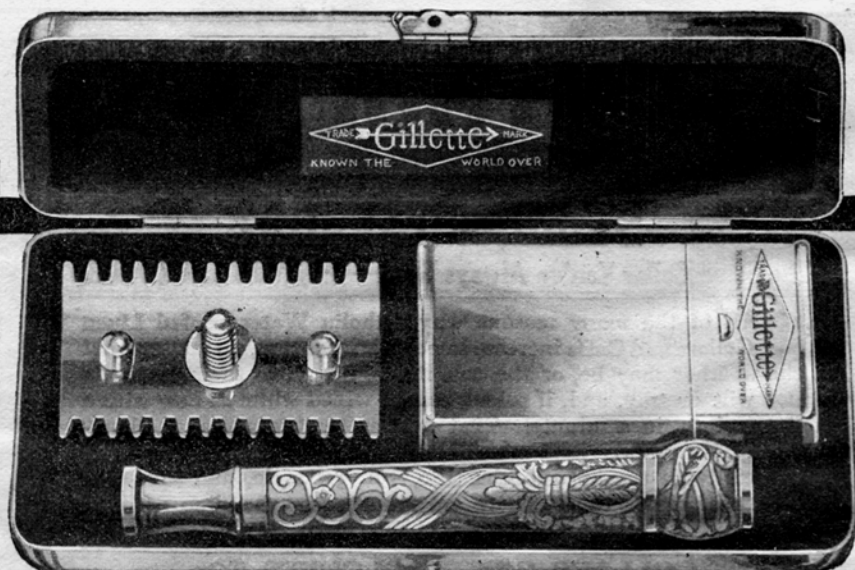
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